

Jean-Louis Curtis

THE FORESTS OF
THE NIGHT

TRANSLATED FROM
THE FRENCH BY NORA WYDENBRUCK



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Foreword

THIS WORK is fiction. Every resemblance to living persons or to events that actually happened must be regarded as purely fortuitous, and every attempt to identify names of people or places should be set aside.

Some readers may be surprised to find the heroic reality of 1940-1944 forming a rather blurred background to a picture that occasionally sets out to embrace the entire subject.

Since the end of the war, many books have been written to describe and exalt those combatants who saved the honor of France and contributed to the final victory. I have nothing to add to these works, and furthermore, my intentions were different.

The world-wide truth of a chronicle must not be sought for here. From the abundance of possible themes, I have only chosen those that suited me, according to the exigencies of the novelist's point of view, which was my point of view when I began to write this book.

If the inspiring side of the period of enemy occupation has only been slightly suggested here, it is because I have chosen to paint the whole of my picture in a somber key, a choice to which I have adhered throughout.

J.-L.C.

THE FORESTS OF THE NIGHT

Part One

A DAY IN NOVEMBER, 1942

1.

FRANCIS was sitting on the carpet in the drawing room, surrounded by outspread newspapers, all the daily papers he had been able to find at the one and only bookshop of the town. He had a feeling that this was not a day like every other day. And in fact, it was not: it was enough to glance at the paper *La Révolution Nationale* to realize that. "There will be no repetition of Mars-el-Kébir. Our brave sailors are doing their duty and straining every nerve to resist shameful American aggression." Assuredly, this news was changing the ideas of millions and millions of individuals all over the earth, while in the sky the Hertzian waves were already crackling with it, carrying sarcasms, imprecations, or messages of hope. Francis was wildly excited. He still had an hour to himself before his afternoon classes were due to begin; he would use it to read all the newspapers, so that he could bring his friends the latest information.

At that very minute a man was thinking of "Monsieur Francis"—a man whom Francis had never seen before. He was following the pavement on the side of the street where the houses had uneven numbers, looking for Number 25. He was asking himself whether it would not be better if he were to risk making a getaway alone—it couldn't be so difficult, even though he was unfamiliar with the countryside. He wondered who this "Monsieur Francis" was; Lorrain of Bordeaux had said he was safe. Ah, there it was! He had found Number 25, a fine-looking house. He did not hesitate. The bell button was there, at the height of

his shoulder, its brass rim gleaming against the gray stone wall. The man pressed his finger on the bell.

Francis stopped reading. He got up without haste, went to the window, and drew back the muslin curtain. He was in no hurry—it was just curiosity. He was not expecting anyone on that particular day; it might be the charwoman who had rung the bell, or one of papa's clients. He saw a man standing before the front door, a man of about twenty-eight or thirty, dressed in a leather jacket and wearing heavy boots, obviously a stranger. Francis told himself, "No, this is not a client, it must be for me." He went down to the hall, still without hurrying, for during the last weeks he had grown accustomed to visitors of this sort. No doubt it was a fellow sent by Lorrain.

He opened the front door.

"You wish to see my father?"

"I would like to see Monsieur Francis," the stranger said. He pronounced the word "M'sieur" and not "Meussieur," as the local inhabitants did. He spoke with a working-class accent, rather commonly, but he had a nice face, open and pleasing. That was it—someone sent by Lorrain.

"Has Lorrain sent you?"

"Yes. Are you Monsieur Francis?"

"Yes. Come in."

He shut the front door again. The tiled hall, furnished with an antique chest, opened onto a large inner courtyard. On the right there was a door with a brass plate bearing the inscription OFFICE. On the wall to the left hung a colored photograph of an old military man who looked very gentle and very noble—a Marshal of France—in a blue, white, and red frame. The stranger stopped in front of the photograph, a quizzical smile curling his lips.

"I haven't mistaken the address?" he asked, turning to Francis.

"No, I'll explain. Come in here," the boy said, pointing to the door of the drawing room. "Sit down," he continued, "and listen to me. If somebody should come in unexpectedly, you are a scout from Bordeaux. A scoutmaster. Your name is Pierre. We camped together in the Landes, before the war. You are re-establishing contact with your teams in the neighborhood."

"Scoutmaster. Camped in the Landes. Pierre. I re-establish contact. Understood."

"It's better that way for the sake of my family."

"Aren't they in on it?"

"No, of course not. It's better that way."

"That's right. Known Lorrain long?"

"For six months. I met him here, by chance. He wanted to get over to the other side. I took him across. So now he sends me people from time to time and gives me various easy little jobs."

"I haven't introduced myself. I'm called the Mohican."

Francis put out his hand. The man shook it vigorously. He glanced at the scattered newspapers.

"Reading the news, were you? Getting pretty close, eh? It won't last much longer—at least we hope so. I'll call you '*tu*,' you don't mind? You look like a kid."

"I'm seventeen," said Francis.

He picked up *La Révolution Nationale* from the floor and smoothed out the pages with the back of his hand.

"They're rattled," he said. "It's a good sign when they're rattled, isn't it?"

"That's right." He was contemplating the drawing room, letting his eyes travel all round it. "You've got a swell place. What's your old man do?"

"Papa is a solicitor."

The Mohican whistled softly, admiring and ironical.

"Grand piano, crystal chandelier, fine house, portraits of ancestors, papa a lawyer, and the photograph of the Marshal in the hall. You're high class."

"No," said Francis, "that's to say, yes," he corrected himself with a smile, "perhaps. But you mustn't judge by the decoration. The place looks grand, but all the stuff dates from a long time ago. Nowadays we are not at all well off—not to say broke. As to the Marshal, well, papa is a Conservative; it's the family tradition. . . . He believes Pétain saved our honor. He's all for '*Patrie-Famille-Travail*'—you know the type. But he's a good man. . . ."

"Who wouldn't hurt a fly. Yes, I know the type. There are plenty like him."

He drew a cigarette case from his pocket, opened it, and offered Francis a cigarette.

"No, thanks, I don't smoke. By the way, you haven't told me yet what you actually want."

The Mohican took out his lighter, lit his cigarette, and inhaled a cloud of smoke.

"To cross over," he said.

"Of course. That's about all Lorrain ever finds for me to do—get people over to the other side. You're the fifth since the beginning of October."

"Is it dangerous?"

"No. Far worse. It's boring. I'd much rather do something more difficult less often. You understand. I've got to show up at my classes at school. I should prefer something more serious that doesn't take up so much of my time."

"You have no choice," the stranger said. "Besides, what you're doing is useful, like all of it. But it's normal at your age to prefer something more . . ." He was looking for the right word and his hand described a circle of smoke in the air, "something more spectacular," he said with mocking emphasis, "a big thrill. I can see why."

"You see a lot. As a Mohican, you ought to be called Great Deer Eye. And you want to go over today, of course?"

"As soon as possible," the Mohican said decidedly.

"Good. I understand. I shall be obliged to cut my classes this afternoon. Three times that's happened now. It'll end in a big row one of these days. Last time I had a lot of trouble stopping the Director of my school from sending a note to papa to inform him. . . . Well, it can't be helped. Listen, there's no point staying here. When you go out, turn to the left and go on as far as the Square. Take the road that goes uphill, just opposite the café. Two hundred meters farther on you'll find a *bistro* called Lavigne. Wait for me there, inside. I'll join you in twenty minutes; it's one twenty now. I'll be with you at a quarter to two. Got that?"

"O.K. The road that goes uphill, Bistro Lavigne, a quarter to two."

While they were in the hall, the door of the office opened and an old gentleman appeared. Short, corpulent, with a red, blotchy face and graying hair, rather prominent sparkling blue eyes, and a short silvery mustache, he resembled an amiable retired English colonel.

"Ah, here's papa," Francis said brightly. "Papa, allow me to introduce Pierre Martineau, my scoutmaster. You remember, I have often told you about him. . . ."

"Of course, of course," exclaimed M. de Balansun. He advanced toward the stranger, both hands outstretched, his lips pursed to a smile, his eyes beaming kindness—the very image of well-bred affability.

"I am delighted to meet you, Monsieur Martineau. My son has the very greatest admiration for you. I am happy, indeed honored, to make your acquaintance."

His high-pitched voice and rapid, almost voluble delivery no longer evoked memories of a retired colonel. Neither did his vivacious, jerky manner and his extremely mobile physiognomy. In repose, M. de Balansun was like an English steel engraving of a sahib in the Indian Civil Service, a colonel of the Bengal Lancers. As soon as he moved and began to speak he became again what he really was—a Gascon nobleman who had endured democracy; a country squire whose ancestors had been obliged, after 1793, to abandon their castle and in the course of events to take up the legal profession; a gentleman who had retained, despite the reverses of fortune, something of the ancient distinction of his race, though diluted with a certain bourgeois geniality.

He was pressing the Mohican's hands in both his own.

"Very honored, Monsieur Martineau," he repeated jovially. The Mohican assumed an expression of polite skepticism.

M. de Balansun was a good talker and he was fond of talking.

"You represent, monsieur," he continued rapidly, "one of the types of humanity for which I have the very highest esteem." (Having a categorical and absolute turn of mind, the lawyer made an immoderate use of superlatives.) "You are one of the spiritual masters of the Scout movement, an admirable institution that upholds, even in our materialistic age, the virile discipline of antiquity. You are linked with the noble institutions of Sparta. You are the Spartans of the twentieth century!" he concluded, waving his hand above his head. Delighted with this turn of phrase, he repeated, "The Spartans of the twentieth century."

"That's right," the Mohican agreed obligingly.

The old man turned to his son and asked, "I hope you have asked M. Martineau to dine with us this evening?" Then, without waiting for an answer, he added, "The frugality that, as I understand, is the essential rule of your *modus vivendi*, will help you, dear monsieur, to accept, without suffering too much, a hospitality that the present penury renders mediocre. Alas!" and here he raised his eyes to the heavens, "we, who have never been Spartans, we have learned, according to the great words of King Lear, to make a virtue of necessity. Ah, if you had come to us in days gone by, in those happier days—"

With an expressive gesture, he evoked the feasts of the past, the lordly style in which the Balansuns lived in the good old days, when a Rabelaisian abundance, allied with aristocratic subtlety, was to be found at their flower-decked tables. The expression of M. de Balansun's face, eloquent of delicate *gourmandise*, said more than a menu. Then it suddenly disappeared and was succeeded by one of deep sadness.

"Those times belong to the past," he murmured. "Monsieur Martineau, we are living in an extraordinary epoch."

The Mohican gave vent to a sympathetic sigh.

"But do not let us indulge in vain regrets," M. de Balansun exclaimed, clearing his throat. "We are counting upon you this evening, dear monsieur. My dear wife—"

"I am afraid that Pierre—" Francis began.

"My dear wife, who also maintains ancient and venerable traditions, though of the culinary order [here he winked] will know how to prepare a Lacedaemonian broth in which feminine ingenuity will compensate for the poverty of the ingredients. And fortunately there are still one or two bottles of Jurançon in my cellar, a wine whose communicative warmth—"

"Papa, my friend Pierre has to leave immediately," Francis interrupted firmly.

M. de Balansun seemed deeply disappointed.

"I deplore it, I deplore it!" he exclaimed. "As today my professional obligations are not of the most pressing nature [on whatever day of the year you met him, the solicitor always happened to be enjoying a miraculous break in the round of his harassing obligations] I would have had the greatest pleasure in acting as your cicerone through our little town, which is so rich in historical reminiscences. Are you partial to the architecture of the thirteenth century?"

"Good God—" said the scoutmaster, in the tone of a caller who has been asked whether he would care for a glass of sauterne.

"You are a connoisseur!" M. de Balansun declared enthusiastically. And turning to his son, he said severely, "You never told me that M. Martineau was a connoisseur." Once again he addressed himself to the enlightened admirer of the ancient stones of the duecento. "One must recognize," he began volubly, "that we find in that period of architecture an alliance of grace and strength, a happy equilibrium of expression, a feeling for line and mass that is rarely achieved in other centuries. Our town boasts two remarkable specimens of this school, so delightfully French. But an ignorant and barbaric municipality has let them fall to ruins in the most shameful fashion."

Francis foresaw that his father would now spend several minutes giving vent to his indignation at the carelessness of municipalities under the Third Republic with regard to their architectural treasures. He was familiar with the refrain on "our national patrimony" and the urgency of provoking a press campaign to show up the administration

of the Beaux-Arts. Before the war, M. de Balansun sent a vigorously worded letter two or three times a year to the editor of the *Figaro*. Actually, the crusade for the conservation of the French patrimony, so criminally neglected, had been one of his favorite activities, and his letters to the *Figaro* represented the best part of the struggle. Unfortunately, his vengeful diatribes had never been granted the honor of appearing in print. However, M. de Balansun always kept a copy on hand, which his friends and relations were made to read. There could be little doubt that the Mohican would also be invited to enjoy these vibrant pages in which M. de Balansun wielded the rod of Juvenal with a mastery worthy of the classics.

"Pierre Martineau will come and see us some other time, papa," Francis said, "I'm afraid he is in rather a hurry today."

"All right, all right. Come again, Monsieur Martineau, come again. I will show you more than one vestige of medieval Saint-Clar and will evoke the prestige of its ancient glory for you," said M. de Balansun, stressing the epigrammatic flavor of his phrase with a discreet little laugh.

"That's right," said the Mohican. "It will be a pleasure."

"Come again. You will be welcome. Consider our roof your own," the old man said effusively. "The Balansuns have this in common with the Spartans—a guest is sacred to them."

Francis opened the door on to the street.

"Au revoir, Pierre. Thanks for your visit," he said in a loud voice, adding softly: "See you in twenty minutes, at Lavigne's."

2.

PIERRE-AUGUSTE-LÉON-MARTIN, Comte de Balansun, was born on March 15, 1880, at Saint-Clar. He was the first of the Balansuns not to see the light of day at La Chênaie, the ancestral home for three centuries. La Chênaie, near Pouillin, Gers, about forty kilometers from Saint-Clar, took its name from a grove of ancient oaks: until recently you could still see a piece of iron in one of the tree trunks. It had supported the very seesaw on which, at the wish of her royal lover Henri IV, young Martine Lagave, the local farmer's daughter, was wont to balance herself with only a flimsy petticoat concealing the expressive curves of her calves, which were justly famous in the surrounding countryside. One day this amiable creature fell from the slippery board into

the arms of her lover, who was sitting on the grass, ogling her lustfully. She came to rest in so graceful, roguish, and voluptuous a manner that the gallant, in his enthusiasm, immediately presented Farmer Lagave with a wretched neighboring village—Balansun.

Forty years later, one of Martine's grandsons, Jean-Martin de Balansun (the name Lagave, reminiscent of so recent an emergence from the vulgar ranks, had been dropped) built at La Chênaie a charming little château, whose gates were henceforth to bear the proud shield of the Balansuns: on a gules ground, a crowned lark soaring upward, with the motto *Toujours plus haut*.

Whatever the heraldic origin of this motto may have been, in the course of the centuries nearly all the Balansuns showed themselves worthy of its highest interpretation. All, that is to say, except Auguste-Palamède-Martin, gunner in the battle of Fontenoy, who, when the French officer requested the English to fire first, was so terror-stricken that he bolted as fast as his legs would carry him and had to be brought back between two soldiers, more dead than alive, his breeches soiled in a ludicrous manner. This hardly honorable exploit was later atoned for by the heroic behavior on the scaffold of one Jean-Démosthène-Martin. Not content with having encouraged his companions in the tumbrel by shouting the *Chant du Départ* in their ears, with a breath smelling strongly of fried onions (his favorite dish, which a kindly jailer had surreptitiously served to him on the very morning of his execution), he ascended the ominous steps with arrogance: on the point of haranguing the crowd, he found himself seized by the executioner and with all the force of his lungs yelled the motto of the Balansuns: "*Toujours plus haut!*"—thus provoking the hilarity of the knitters surrounding the guillotine, whose rude sense of humor was much tickled by the incongruity of this declaration by one whose head, two seconds later, was to roll to the bottom of the basket.

The death of Désmosthène-Martin marks the end of the glories of the Balansuns: from then their lives became colorless and moved into the rut of an everyday, democratic mediocrity from which even the Napoleonic era failed to raise them. The family, ruined by the Revolution, attempted to recoup its fortunes by absurd financial speculations that very nearly landed one of the Balansuns in jail. These cruel trials were settled after 1870 by the sale of La Chênaie. The Balansuns took up residence in Saint-Clar, a small town in the Pyrenees, where some of their more fortunate relations were already living, and here they set up a solicitor's office.

In 1901, Pierre-Auguste-Léon-Martin (known as Léon), a second lieutenant fresh from the cavalry school at Saumur, spent a week's holiday in Paris. It was the first time he had visited the capital, where his ancestor at sixteen was already known in the Louvre. Léon-Martin's personality only remotely recalled the rustic charm of the founder of the dynasty. There was nothing rustic about him, but he also lacked the youthful grace that is the only immutable value in this world. In spite of his short, stocky build, his emphatic and noisy manner, he was a likable young man. It was so obvious that nothing he did was premeditated or calculating; his words poured out so spontaneously. And his eyes, of that very pure blue that often, in young people, indicates a hard or a cold nature, shone with good humor, kindness, and a child-like trustfulness that nothing could change. The Count, who had taken a room in a shabby hotel in the rue Monsieur-le-Prince, was deeply moved at the sight of the Louvre, but not for a moment did he think of comparing the circumstances of his ancestors with his own, or of following this humiliating comparison with bitter and subtle reflections on the decadence of the Balansuns. He had never read Barres, nor was he, by nature, addicted to the cult of the ego; and his feelings were not sufficiently sensitive to be upset by such rare conflicts. Neither did he experience a tremor of wounded pride, or register a fierce vow to recapture the heights. For he had not read Balzac and his heart was untouched by envy, or even ambition.

No, young Léon-Martin most certainly did not complain of his lot. He had just passed brilliantly, at Saumur, the exam for reserve officers. In his pocket was a month's pay, which would allow him to indulge in a week of glory in Paris. With a classmate he visited the Trocadéro, the Musée Grévin, the Sainte-Chapelle; he experienced a revelation of art when he heard *L'Africaine* from a cheap seat in the gallery of the Opéra, and of high life when he witnessed Boni de Castellane kissing the hand of Polaire in the foyer. Finally his friend, who was a rake, chose two girls at Maxim's and in the Chinese boudoir of one of these "madly perverse" creatures M. de Balansun experienced the supreme revelation of voluptuous pleasure.

After this busy week, so rich in emotions, discoveries, and audacious explorations of the Parisian jungle, the Count returned to Saint-Clar, exhausted, panting, and delighted. He was never to visit the capital again, but he was convinced that the modern Babylon held no secrets from him. He believed that the experience he had acquired during those hectic days was amply sufficient for a lifetime. Twenty years later, after

a meal with friends, he still liked to remember, with a discreet allusion accompanied by a wink, the indiscretions of his youth, the wild oats he had sown when he was twenty and thus acquired the worldly experience indispensable to a young man of breeding. He openly proclaimed his admiration for Mme Polaire, adding, "that evening, she was wearing a necklace of lapis lazuli." He deplored the fact that, according to information he had recently received from a cousin employed in the Ministry of Finance, the tradition of such high-flown gallantry was now lost. Whenever a student he knew "went up" to Paris to continue his studies, M. de Balansun would warmly recommend the cheap seats in the gallery of the Opéra, so excellent for hearing *L'Africaine*, and admonish him, in words as chaste as they were obscure, not to be led astray after visiting Maxim's—at least not before having attained his majority.

When he was thirty-five, Léon-Martin yielded to the affectionate urging of his father and married Emilie de Moranne, the daughter of a neighboring squire who was directly descended from Gaston de Roux, Baron de Saint-Clar (1331-1366). His choice was a judicious one. Emilie was devout and rather austere, but kind and affectionate, and developed into a model wife. One year later, Marie-Nativité-Hélène de Balansun was born, to the great joy of her parents. But it was not till ten years later that M. de Balansun was given a male heir, Jean-Francis-Martin. Both children were a living contradiction to the old theory that certain conditions of youth and mutual passion are needed to produce a fine brood: they were both extremely satisfying examples of young human beings.

Hélène was still in her cradle when the solicitor, conscientious father that he was, studied several manuals on education. (Had he not, on the day following his betrothal, as a modern and enlightened young man, a twentieth century fiancé who enters knowingly into the state of matrimony, who has rejected the ancient sexual taboos as harmful prejudices, rushed to the bookseller of Saint-Clar to ask for a manual on wedded love? Far from making this request with the modicum of modesty and discretion which another, especially one more versed in these matters than he would have employed, he demanded "*Sous le soleil de l'amour*" by Doctor Grosjean, in a loud, clear voice, as though he had been asking for the "Perfect Handyman's Manual." He inquired about the quality of the book from the bookseller—a hardened old bachelor—and expressed his delight that the author had dedicated a long chapter to obstetrics and other clinical problems that brought a blush to the cheeks

of the bookseller, but not to those of his customer, contrary to what usually happens in these cases.) Out of respect to our great French philosophers, M. de Balansun glanced at the pages of *Émile*, but he did not conceal from his wife that this book, though undoubtedly a masterpiece from the literary point of view, was out of date from the pedagogic one. On the other hand, he was dazzled by the new lights shed on the subject by Madame Montessori, although he deplored the fact that this author assigned so very unimportant a role to the exercise of paternal authority. M. de Balansun did not trifle with his position as *pater familias* and he announced his firm intention of making his children aware that there existed in the house an inflexible will to which they must submit. Madame de Balansun could not help being slightly alarmed when he professed these intransigent and slightly archaic doctrines, especially as they were accompanied by a fierce frown in the direction of the cradle, where, among the foaming white clouds of tulle, little Hélène was sucking her big toe and contemplating the world with a radiantly blue, ecstatic, and empty gaze. Later on, however, Madame de Balansun was to realize that her husband was far from putting his theories into practice and that the modern aspects of the educational methods of this uncompromising father went even farther than those of Mme de Montessori. It would actually have been difficult to invent a more ingenuously fanciful educator. Outside his professional duties, M. de Balansun consecrated a great part of his free time to diverse hobbies: a series of humorous essays on "The Surprises of Bridge," a collection of architectural documents (consisting of books, photographs, and illustrated albums), and above all, the biography of Gaston le Roux, Baron de Saint-Clar, a local and medieval celebrity who had become a great favorite of the solicitor. An assiduous reader of several serious magazines, among others the *Revue des Deux Mondes* (he shared a collective subscription with the staff of the secondary school at Saint-Clar) M. de Balansun was an authority on foreign affairs. He juggled nonchalantly with the names of various mythological entities, such as the White House, the Foreign Office, the Wilhelmstrasse and, after 1918, the Kremlin—a word which he pronounced either facetiously or in sepulchral tones, according to whether he considered the U.S.S.R. "a presumptuous experiment doomed to fail," or on the contrary, "a much to be feared attempt to demolish the most sacred values." Among prominent statesmen, he paid special homage to M. Delcassé, whose steadfast efforts toward the Entente Cordiale he had watched with passionate interest in the years around 1900. He considered him the diplomat *par*

excellence, superior even to M. Talleyrand because, though Delcassé also wore silken hose, he lacked his predecessor's other disadvantages. All this goes to prove that the Count, having to share his time between deeds of sale, "The Surprises of Bridge," Gothic cathedrals, Gaston le Roux, Washington, and M. Delcassé no longer had time to take an active interest in what became of his progeny. True, he sometimes took a hand in their upbringing, showing qualities of coherence, regularity, and especially of psychological insight that would have fatally shaken the nervous system of children less sturdy than his own. His notion of the nature of a child was not exactly correct, up-to-date, or intuitive. It was a medley of ready-made ideas, of clichés about childhood, and of his own theories, which were always ephemeral, extreme, and distorted; from an intellectual point of view, one might say that there was something Gothic about them, even of that flamboyant period for which M. de Balansun professed so genuine a scorn. Thus, for instance, when Francis was five or six years old, M. de Balansun suddenly got the idea that children should be led, from the tenderest age, to appreciate the great manifestations of the human spirit. Taking the little boy on his knees, he showed him a terrifying collection of medieval horrors, grinning gargoyles, demons from cathedrals, crypts filled with skulls and skeletons, etc., accompanying this with little simplified commentaries calculated to be assimilated by the young mind "without the slightest difficulty." Francis, rigid with terror, ended by bursting into tears and spending a night disturbed by the most ghastly nightmares. These results led M. de Balansun to entertain serious misgivings about the artistic abilities of his son.

M. de Balansun was the personification of absent-mindedness, narrow-mindedness, and puerility, but he dreamed only of stern discipline, rigid systems, and deep stratagems. The most inoffensive of men, he imagined himself to be another Plutarch, Machiavelli, or Abbé de Saint-Cyran. The commands he addressed to his children when they were guilty of some minor offense—such as stealing jam, being disobedient, or forgetting the rules of etiquette—were so noble and dignified that they would have been worthy of a Roman senator. M. de Balansun addressed the culprits formally as "*vous*," calling them "sir" or "miss," as the case might be; in icy tones, which trembled with an indignation almost impossible to control, he would utter a sharp and crushing rebuke, crowned by some moral axioms of universal application, which the author of Ecclesiastes would not have disavowed. These admonitions, delivered in the purest classical style, could not fail to make an

impression at first, but over the years, their frequent repetition robbed them of much of their force. All the more so because it sometimes happened that M. de Balansun addressed his wife and his children as "*vous*" when he was carried away by the rhythm of a fiery tirade he was delivering about M. Delcassé or the bad faith of the Kremlin and, forgetting that he was holding forth to his own family, imagined himself addressing an audience of his own age and sex, his friends at the Club, for instance—among others that M. Lecaussade whose mania for contradiction always infuriated him. Thus the "*vous*," the "sir," and the "miss" no longer impressed anybody. They were listened to a little regretfully, with affectionate resignation, and sometimes with wistful and slightly protective amusement. As a matter of fact, the Balansun children adored their father. Had he been logical and reasonable, they would undoubtedly have hated him.

3.

"HASN'T your father ever noticed anything?"

"No. He's always a bit up in the clouds. I don't like having to lie to him so often, but I just can't tell him the truth. He wouldn't understand and it would scare him."

"You can't ever tell old people the truth. They don't understand the first thing about these rotten times. We must just let them go on living in another era—fifty years behind us."

"My father sometimes lives several centuries behind. He lives in the time when the ruins of Saint-Clar weren't ruins. But I'm fond of him. He's a good man."

"He's funny, you know. I nearly split a gut when he started on those long spiels. He spouts like a book, your father does. Say, by the way, when you've got to miss school like today, what d'you tell him?"

"It's only happened twice so far, and I've been able to get out of it without his noticing, or having to explain anything. But some day or other, if it happens again, the principal is sure to tell him, and then—"

"And what if you got caught? By the Boches?"

"I don't think there's much danger of that. The patrol usually passes at half past one and then at three. In between times they're hardly ever about. I know their schedule pretty well. The best time to cross over is between two and three."

"Haven't you ever had a close call?"

"Once I nearly did. I was going home. It was in October, about nine o'clock in the evening. Fortunately it was dark and they didn't recognize me. They shouted at me to stop. I hadn't seen them. I was walking along quietly. I stopped dead. They shouted again and I heard the click of a trigger. I turned round and ran off as fast as my legs would carry me. They fired twice in my direction. The first bullet whistled past my ear just as I was jumping over a hedge. I ran for about five minutes. They had no dogs with them, otherwise I would have had it. I came home by another road. I was still in the street at half past eleven, after curfew. I told my parents that I'd spent the evening with a friend and we'd forgotten the time."

"Haven't you ever got mixed up in your stories?"

"No. Besides, my parents trust me absolutely."

"Got any brothers or sisters?"

"An elder sister. She's in Paris. She works in a laboratory— Look out now. Keep your head down. Open country, they can see us two kilometers away. We've got to run across. Ready? Let's go."

The Mohican was getting his breath back.

"Don't the Boches ever wander over here?"

"No. Up till now they have obeyed their orders. The demarcation line follows the road from Saint-Clar to Dax. The patrols have the right to scour the country two hundred meters beyond the line. I've never seen any of them go any farther."

"What are they like, the Boches, in your section?"

"They don't do anything very much. But the people here don't give them a chance. They all do as they're told, more or less. Of course, every once in a while they arrest someone who tries to pass the line. A few days in the jug and a fine. On the whole, you don't notice them much. I mean, once you're used to seeing their uniforms in the streets and in the café, of course. A German officer lives in our house; we rarely see him. He comes in late at night and he keeps to himself."

"Got many collaborators around here?"

"No. Not active collaborators, that is. People who like the Germans, yes; a few who meet them and receive them socially in their homes. Chiefly among the wealthy, but not exclusively. But they're harmless, you know. I think we have more to fear from the girls who go with Germans."

"The bitches. They'll get what's coming to them. I say, I've noticed you always say the Germans, never the Boches. Why? Does the word stick in your throat?"

"Why should it? It's just that it doesn't come naturally to me. I must say that I don't feel any particular hatred for them. I hope they'll be beaten as soon as possible. That's all."

"If your sister were to sleep with a Boche, with a filthy little Prussian, wouldn't you call him a dirty Boche?"

Francis flushed to the ears.

"I can't answer that. It's impossible for me to imagine such a thing. My sister would never do anything like that."

The Mohican laid his hand on the boy's shoulder as he continued to pick his way through the undergrowth.

"I didn't mean to hurt your feelings, kid. I'm sure your sister has nothing in common with a bitch. Things like that just don't happen in your family. But listen. If they were to come and arrest your father, for instance, and lock him in a cell and beat him up all day long to make him give away your hide-out, that kind of thing happens all the time now. Well, wouldn't you want to have one or two of them at your disposal, tied to a tree so that you could beat the life out of them—and call them dirty Boches?"

Silence.

"Answer me," said the Mohican.

"Well, I'd probably go and give myself up at once. That would be the simplest thing to do, wouldn't it?"

The Mohican snapped his fingers impatiently.

"You're not answering my question; you agree with me but you don't want to admit it."

They were walking through the damp undergrowth. The soft soil gave way under their feet and stuck to the soles of their boots. Low-hanging, frayed clouds slowly moved over the southern horizon, where one could make out the indistinct contours of the mountains through the mist. A long-drawn-out cry, hoarse and melancholy, like the very spirit of autumn, rose from distant woods. After a few minutes of silence, the Mohican gave a quick glance at his companion.

"You're a Christian, aren't you?" he asked.

"Yes."

"What do you think Christ would think of things if He were to come to France today?"

"I've never asked myself that question."

"Do you think He'd preach forgiveness and love of one's enemies and so on?"

Francis smiled and shrugged his shoulders without answering.

"You're a Christian," insisted the Mohican. "That means you're for the Church?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'm against it," he said aggressively, "I can't stand preachers or the Army."

"That's your business."

"In normal times I would have considered you as an adversary. Maybe the time will come when I'll look on you as an adversary again."

"I'm sorry," Francis said calmly.

"What do you mean?"

"What I say. I'm sorry. I'll always look on you as a comrade, I suppose."

The Mohican chuckled in a rather sarcastic fashion.

"Christian charity again: all men are brothers: children, love ye one another, what?"

"No," said Francis. "It's just my nature."

This answer didn't seem to mollify the Mohican. He had picked up a dead twig and as he went along he hit out at the tops of the plants with a violent gesture.

"My nature," he said ironically. "I am so nice and gentle and I have no hatred for anyone. My nature—admirable. And I go to Mass every Sunday, and sure, I belong to the Fraternity of Saint Vincent de Paul or to the little Crusaders of the Eucharist—or to the little gigolos of Saint Thérèse de l'Enfant Jésus. And I go to school with the sons of the best families in town—and papa is a distinguished gentleman who talks like a book— Oh, no! I don't hate anybody. I'm much too well brought up. Hatred is all right for the—lower classes" (he pronounced "*les basses classes*" with a burlesque emphasis, as though there were several circumflex accents on the letters "a"). "Our high station forbids us to harbor such vulgar sentiments— We are the salt of the earth and we'll have the best places in Heaven, too, which is as it should be." He was not looking at his companion and continued to hit out at the bracken along the edge of the path. "Well, me," he continued, still with harsh irony and passion, "I was born in the Plain. I suppose you don't know that swell suburb? It's near Paris, a super garden spot, just think — As to the Fraternity of Saint Vincent de Paul, we were half a dozen kids who spent the whole day on the Fortifications. That was our school. We had a regular teacher, a little squirt of seventeen or eighteen who taught us different ways of getting money without working—like

stealing from the stalls in the market or the shops, or begging on the steps of the Sacré Cœur. I've played blind man's son with a tramp for three months— You don't need any capital to start that business—only one prop, a pair of black glasses. I swiped them at the Prix-Unic. You should have heard the tramp moaning 'Take pity on a poor blind man.' I used to lead him. He looked so natural, stumbling on the steps, the old shyster, that it'd give you the creeps. I used to wonder sometimes if he wasn't really blind. In the evening we'd split the spoils at the Fortifications. What's more, let me tell you, my Ma knew all about it. She had a way of emptying my pockets now and then, without a word—as tactful and discreet as could be. All the same, she'd crack down on me if I cut up rough. I got fed up with the Fortifications when I was fourteen, so I moved out of 'home, sweet home' [he uttered these words with a pathetic tremor in his voice, like a bass in the Opéra Comique] and started out on my own— The reason I didn't end by pimping the Place Pigalle wasn't so much that it went against my 'innate decency' [again the tremor in his voice, this time like that of a defending counsel at a Magistrate's Court] I just wasn't the right build, see. In spite of everything, I couldn't stomach that kind of thing. Besides, I had a job I liked as metal fitter. In the eighteenth district. I started to read and to attend political meetings. I began to understand things. I knew a guy who was a teacher at Rollin, a swell guy, I can tell you. He got me reading a pile of books and explained them as we went along. Proudhon, for instance. Have you read Proudhon? No! You go to school, you're eighteen, and you haven't read that? What the hell do you do at school? I read it all one winter and the guy from Rollin explained all the difficult bits. That's how I picked up all I could, one way or another. D'you know what it means—to be crazy to learn: to be crazy to know and understand: and to be ashamed of being ignorant and of speaking badly and making mistakes all the time? Do you know what that means? Well, now you know. One day, I went back to the Plain. I hadn't been there for ten years—and they hadn't tried to see me again either. An Arab was living in our shack. I asked a neighbor for news. 'Aren't you la Germaine's kid?' she said. 'Poor Germaine, she died at Lariboisière—two, three years ago. She was quite off her nut.' I didn't shed any tears, son, that's not my style. And I didn't go to the cemetery, either, to look for la Germaine's grave and lay flowers on it. Decorating graves with flowers isn't my style either. I thought a lot about la Germaine, who was everything you might like to call her, nothing very nice either, I can

tell you, but she was my mother after all and she died raving mad at Lariboisière . . . And I began to understand a lot of things." In a dreamy, almost inaudible voice he repeated: "A lot of things—"

Falling silent, he threw away the twig with which he had been hitting the bracken and thrust his hands into the pockets of his leather jacket. They kept on walking, without speaking; the only sound was the soft squelching of the loam under their feet. They came out into the open, leaving the undergrowth behind. The sky was gray, the color of lead. The hill they had climbed sloped down toward a scene bounded by brown and yellow fields. To the west, in a valley veiled in mist, one could distinguish the roofs of Saint-Clar, the ruins of Gaston le Roux's castle, and the green winding ribbon of the river Gave. Beyond the town lay the slopes where, more than a century earlier, Montgomery's armies had deployed in Chalosse. It was on the opposite road, the one leading to Dax, that the German troops had deployed in Béarn.

"Say," asked the Mohican suddenly, "do you think that it'll all be over when the Germans have been chased out; that the country will be free again and all Frenchmen will celebrate the victory together, Communists and Christians alike, and everything will be all right?"

He looked searchingly at Francis. The boy turned his head toward him. A slight shadow flitted across the childish features, but his eyes were like a calm, shining pool.

"Yes, I believe that," Francis said gently. "I'm waiting for it."

"Well, that's where you're mistaken. That'll only be the beginning."

Young Balansun turned his head away. He stretched out his hands toward a road at the foot of the hill.

"You're in the free zone," he said. "I haven't got time to accompany you any farther. That road will lead you to a little village two kilometers from here. You can hire a car there for Pau. Ask at the inn, they'll tell you, they're used to this. Tell them I sent you."

The Mohican had not taken his eyes off Francis' face. He seemed unable to make up his mind to leave. He looked down and mumbled: "Listen—I've been kind of a swine, with my stories. You have done me a favor, a damn big favor, and all I can do in exchange is to make you listen to my little speeches, my little grudges—as though you were responsible!"

He looked up and smiled.

"You'll forgive me, won't you?"

"Yes," said Francis.

"After all, you know," the Mohican went on, "I haven't any particular hatred for the Boches either. Because, as far as I'm concerned, they're not responsible either for—for Lariboisière, and the things that happened fifteen years ago—and that, if you start thinking about it, is the real evil of this earth. That, multiplied a million times over, if you get what I mean."

He seemed to be searching for words, trying to co-ordinate difficult ideas. He said slowly and hesitantly, still in a mumbling tone: "And that kind of evil is the kind you don't want, yet can't destroy. War won't destroy it, and peace, when it comes, will find the evil still flourishing everywhere on earth, only worse. That's why, as I told you, it will all have to begin all over again. That's why I sometimes wonder whether it's any use, this fighting the Boches, and all the risks we take, at every turn." He corrected himself quickly, "No, sure it's useful: we've got to throw them out so that we can breathe. Breathe, and then hit at the rest, the real evil. Because when we look at the world around us and we see, even with the Boches in France, well, how the French go on squabbling among themselves and defending their private interests like dogs fighting for a bone—and ready to do anyone in all the time, turning informers, writing anonymous letters to the Kommandatur, and so on. Then you wonder, when you're feeling low, whether you aren't being a sucker after all, and whether all those you really hate won't end up by getting together, when the Boches are beaten, so that the victory will be—how shall I say—juggled for their own profit, so that it won't mend anything, it won't do away with evil, and we'll be had for suckers, you and I and all the poor dopes—"

These last words "you and I and all the poor dopes" he had said with a little laugh that was at the same time bitter, arrogant, and defiant: in the amorphous mass of dupes and victims, the ruined middle classes would be able to shake hands with the population of the Fortifications.

"Yes," he went on, "all this is not very, very nice. Better not think about it. As your old man says"—he imitated M. de Balansun's precise and well-bred accents—"We are living in an extraordinary epoch, Monsieur Martineau. Yes, kid, better not think about it."

Then he smiled and said in a changed voice, "But it's good to meet a boy like you, a clean kid. At first it gets on your nerves a bit, because you're not used to it. You see, it seems faked, not quite real. But it is real. That's good." He looked at the road at the bottom of the hill. "The free zone," he said. "Are those the Pyrenees over there? They're fine, the

Pyrenees. In a week or so, I'll be over on the other side, I hope. *Caramba! Ollé! Ollé Señorita!*—and in a month, I hope, in North Africa. And later perhaps in England."

Francis' face brightened.

"You're going to England?" he exclaimed.

"Perhaps, I said."

"To England!"

"Why are you getting so excited about that . . .?"

"You're the first person I've come across who's going to England. Listen. I'm going to ask you something. Do me a favor, a big favor. Will you?"

"Tell me what it is. If it's something I can do, it'll be a pleasure."

"Here goes. My sister was engaged to a fellow who got over to Spain last year. He wanted to get to England too. But three months later we heard that he was in jail at Saragossa. The Spaniards locked him up, and some others, too. And since then we haven't had any news of him, not even through the Red Cross. Listen, could you find out, over there in Spain or in Africa? He wanted to join the R.A.F. His name is Jean de Lavoncourt. I'll write it down on a piece of paper, wait . . . and the last address we had. He's a fellow of twenty-seven—"

He took out a notebook and a fountain pen.

"It would be wonderful if you could find out something about him."

The Mohican beamed.

"You can be sure I'll do all I can, son, and if he's still in the jug in Spain, I know a way of getting him out. I've got addresses, and I know someone at the American Embassy in Madrid."

Francis' eyes shone. "Oh! that would be wonderful! You know, Jean's a good man, but not very resourceful, not too smart . . . Intelligent, but not smart."

"I'm smart enough for two," said the Mohican.

He took the bit of paper Francis handed to him and slipped it into the inner pocket of his jacket.

"Well, here's where our ways part. So long, son. Perhaps I'll come by this way again in a year's time. I'll come and see you."

"Right," said Francis. "Good luck!"

Suddenly the Mohican put his arms round him and held him tight for a second. Then he let him go and started climbing down the slope, in the direction of the road. Francis followed him with his eyes. When he was about thirty yards away, the Mohican turned round and held his hand trumpet-wise to his mouth.

"Hi!" he shouted. "When I come back you must tell your father to prepare his funny dish with the great long name. The watchamacallit broth. It must be a hell of a good dish."

Francis smiled and waved his hand.

4.

MME COSTELLOT, smoking a cigarette, was watching the quiet gray street through the windowpane.

"There," she said, "the Balansun boy must have crossed the line again. His boots are muddy and he's got that cocky look he always has after these expeditions."

Jacques Costellot lounged back in his easy chair, leaned his head against the cushion, closed his eyes, and murmured, "The Secret Service."

Mme Costellot turned round sharply. Her tall, full figure was tightly encased in a well cut suit of expensive, beige-colored cloth. Her auburn hair, brushed up from the nape of her neck, made a heavy crown over her high, massive brow marked by almost imperceptible lines. She possessed a kind of beauty that was slightly ravaged, but proud and dominating. Although she was fifty, she could still pass, on her good days, as the elder sister of her son.

"What did you say?" she asked.

Jacques was blowing smoke rings into the air and watching the spirals mount toward the ceiling.

"I said that Sherlock Holmes might have taken lessons from you. I have never known anybody so quick to detect smugglers and unmarried pregnant women."

"I am fairly observant," she replied, pretending not to notice his sarcasm. "It must be the third or fourth time I have seen that young Balansun coming back from the Dax road with mud on his boots, even in dry weather. Besides, I noticed him this afternoon, with a man who looked like a jailbird, though he probably had a well-stuffed wallet."

"You're convinced, of course," Jacques murmured nonchalantly, "that he gets paid for it."

Madame Costellot raised the black semicircle of her left eyebrow. "But, of course! They all get paid. Why, the other day Mme Begué was telling me that her dairymaid got a thousand francs from a Jew."

"There's a slight difference between Mme Begué's dairywoman and young Balansun."

"Pah! Why do you imagine a schoolboy of sixteen or seventeen would cross the line and risk being caught, unless he got paid for it? Especially as the Balansuns are hard up and Francis can't be getting much pocket money. Getting people across—it's a paying proposition."

"Possibly he does it for the sake of his patriotic or political convictions. Considering the antecedents of the family and the kind of education he has received, that might well be the case."

However, if Jacques could not imagine anyone who was not a fool performing a disinterested action, Mme Costellot, who adhered involuntarily to the harsh school of La Rochefoucauld and the great French moralists, could not imagine that there was such a thing as pure disinterest.

"No, no," she said. "You are far too optimistic. That Balansun boy with his angelic face is far more cunning than you think. He looks as though butter would not melt in his mouth, with his shy, timid ways. Phew! You shouldn't be deceived by appearances."

"So you have also discovered that the boy is a low blackguardly character?"

"I haven't discovered anything," she retorted drily. "It is my impression, that's all, and as you know, my impressions are usually correct." She nodded vigorously. "Of course, old Balansun is quite off the beam and his wife is a poor insignificant creature whose interests are divided between ration books and the Bible. But, when it comes to the innocence of the younger generation, that's another matter. The daughter, for instance. It's all very well for her to pose as a wise virgin, with her hair parted in the middle and her inexpensive dresses, but you can't tell me she wasn't Lavoncourt's mistress last year. Her fiancé—pah! When people go walking by the Gave as I saw them, they needn't try to fool people afterward."

"Were they walking in an indecent way?"

"No, not exactly indecent. But their looks spoke volumes. And you should have seen how the girl blushed when she recognized me!"

"Let those who have never sinned cast the first stone!"

"Oh, I promise you I couldn't care less whether they do this, that, or the other thing—or nothing at all. They are free, their private life isn't the slightest concern of mine. But she has no business to go about running holiday camps and day nurseries and girl scout troupes after all that."

"I can't see any hypocrisy in that. After all, she would have married Lavoncourt if he hadn't gone to Spain."

"Of course. And nothing would please me more. I wish with all my heart that he'll come back from Spain and marry her as soon as possible, poor girl. It's her only chance."

Jacques smiled. "Hélène de Balansun is considered a pretty girl," he said in the same nonchalant tone.

"I can't understand what people see in her," said Mme Costellot, tapping her fingers on the arm of her chair nervously. "She's a real Huguenot type, thin and insipid, with that bun at the nape of her neck and her expressionless, lifeless face. Right now she can still get by, she's not thirty yet. But wait a few years—she'll be all sharp corners, with a rough skin and stringy hair. Exactly the Huguenot type," she repeated, and the gleam that lighted the flames of St. Bartholomew flashed in her eyes.

"Gérard Delahaye compares her to a young amazon," said Jacques.

"A young amazon indeed! That is to say, that instead of having one of her breasts cut off, as the amazons did, she hasn't got any to start with. Flat as a board. It's quite simple, everything about her is flat. Gérard Delahaye must have told you that long ago, when he was eighteen and was in perpetual adoration of Hélène. By the way, what is he doing now, that big booby?"

"I believe he's still going in for journalism, more or less, in Paris. Writing literary reviews and things like that. I read an article of his in *La Gerbe* last week."

"He was here this summer."

"I know. I met him one evening at the movies, but we only exchanged a few words. He was with Hélène, as a matter of fact."

"So it still flourishes, the *grande passion* of his adolescence? And I bet he plays the role of the noble, self-sacrificing lover? There's an innocent for you! Men like him, with the eyes of an unhappy dog, seem to have a canine fidelity in their make-up. They love only once in a lifetime. You'll see, when Hélène is married. Gérard will be the friend of the family, the godfather of the children, the uncle with his pockets full of candies—a touching character from a comedy by Labiche."

She started, for a long snore arose from the easy chair near the fireplace, where a wood fire was crackling. A man of about sixty, fat and red faced, was snoozing, sprawling in the easy chair. His left hand—a plump pink hand, hung down. Between the flaps of his unbuttoned waistcoat his protuberant stomach rose and fell in time with his breath-

ing. For a little while, Mme Costellot gazed at the stomach in silence.

"I'd forgotten he was here," she said at last.

"He's been asleep ever since we had coffee," Jacques stated. Mme Costellot threw her cigarette into an ash tray.

"Will you get the kitchen knife?" she said with a cruel smile. "Shall we bleed him?"

She crossed her legs, supporting her elbow on her knees and cupping her chin in her hand, and stared at the sleeping man with the profoundly serious expression of someone about to meditate on the infinity of space.

"Isn't he revolting?" she began thoughtfully. "Doesn't he look like a retired horse trader? No, not a horse trader. A horse trader is strong and hefty, has rough hands, and ends up by looking like a horse himself. He's more like an old eunuch or an Oriental pasha. I wonder how your mother-in-law could bring herself to sleep with that for thirty years!"

"Evidently, my mother-in-law isn't as sensitive to appearances as you are."

"No, poor good woman. If she were she would not deck herself out like an exotic parrot at her age. Well, let's not say unkind things about them. Thank Heaven, you haven't anything to complain about as far as your in-laws are concerned. They really love you as though you were their son. That's not usual nowadays."

The snores by the fire grew louder, rising and falling in comic modulations.

"Pah!" exclaimed Mme Costellot, "even though he is the best of men, I won't be able to stand this sight for the rest of the evening. Besides, I can't stand the sound of snoring. Your father used to snore like a gram-pus. That was the only thing I could reproach him with, by the way. He had no mistresses, no vices, no advanced opinions. But he snored. Christ, how it got on my nerves! Many a night I've longed to throw him out of the window. It was maddening— Well, shall we wake him up, the old pasha?"

"Go ahead, you're better with him than I am."

Mme Costellot began to whistle in the direction of the snores. She whistled like a man. The pink, hanging hand did not move.

"*Hep! dia, dia, la Rougel!*" shouted Mme Costellot, imitating the long guttural cry of a local cow girl.

The pink hand started and gripped the arm of the chair.

"Hello, Victor," Mme Costellot said jovially, "I thought you weren't

going to wake up again. You know the doctor has forbidden you to go to sleep after meals. And near the fire, too! There's nothing worse for the digestion. An apoplexy is so easily come by," she added, with perfidious gentleness. "If you could only see what your face looks like just now. My word, like a sign before an eating house—'*Au Joyeux Gargantua*' or something like that."

M. Lardenne readjusted his waistcoat, rubbed his eyes and smoothed his white hair.

"You are right, my dear, you're quite right." His voice was soft and high pitched, his enunciation slow and brittle. "I should not let myself go like this, that is certain. Ah! if I had your youth, your vitality— Who did you say I looked like?"

"An inn sign: '*Au Joyeux Gargantua*.'"

M. Lardenne gave a hoarse appreciative chuckle.

"Your mother is as mischievous as ever, my dear Jacques. You shouldn't make fun of a poor old man who is almost crippled, my dear Marguerite. But I must tell you that if I wished to be like some great character in literature, Gargantua would certainly have been my ideal. That brave, insatiable, libidinous, heroic, and handsome Gargantua—Alas, I have been the most faithful of husbands, though not always the most sober of men, and as for embittered struggles, I have never battled except with figures, drafts, and check books. I'm an old businessman who has missed nearly every good thing life can offer. An old banker, that is to say, an old accountant, who worked on a slightly larger scale than ordinary accountants. But what did I get out of my far-reaching activities? The satisfaction of mastering dull financial problems, of coming to grips with my own worries, and with those of other people. For, like the scapegoat, I had to be responsible for sins that I had not committed. When I think of all the idiots I have saved from bankruptcy! The fortunes I have made for other people in the midst of inflations, crashes, and other catastrophes! Every day, by my foresight and astuteness, repairing the innumerable errors of others—"

"Scapegoat and good shepherd at the same time," said Jacques.

"Exactly, my friend, and all that without the beneficiaries knowing a thing about it most of the time."

"Surely you reminded them of it at the close of the year," Mme Costellot remarked.

The hoarse laugh filled the room.

"That was my wage, my dear Marguerite. A wretched wage: a signa-

ture at the foot of a check and they thought I had been paid for all my sweats and my sleepless nights and the terrible strain on my brain—They thought they had settled the debt.”

Gripping the arms of his chair with both hands, he heaved himself up with a painful effort: Mme Costellot and her son watched him without moving, from the depth of their unruffled serenity. The old man stretched, cracking the ancient joints of his shapeless body. Then, walking carefully, with uncertain and heavy steps, he went toward the window.

“And yet,” he continued, “I was cut out for a different fate. I was meant to extract from life only its more rare, gracious, and exquisite joys. Do you know, Jacques, that when I was twenty I was modeling statuettes in a studio near the *Sacré Cœur*? My models were enchanting Sicilian girls.” His plump pink hand slowly traced a curve in the air. “Enchanting Sicilian girls,” he repeated, and his voice was like a melody played on a distant flute, a fugitive and melancholy echo of a very ancient pastorate. “And at sixteen, at the *lycée*, I was the best at rhetoric of my class. I knew all the odes of Horace by heart, and many a page of Catullus.” He sighed. “There is a contrast, isn’t there, my dear Jacques, between those delights and the sinister cages behind which you can see my humbler colleagues counting notes, eternally counting, like anxious monkeys.”

Mme Costellot was watching him with a round and sparkling eye.

“Pah! You have had other sensations, Victor, no less thrilling. For instance, the quotations on the Stock Exchange and the dizzy rise in South American shares—”

M. Lardenne laughed again.

“The thrill of gambling and taking risks— Alas, today I fear I could no longer indulge even in these sensations, Marguerite. They are a little too violent for my tired heart.” He looked out of the window. “Haven’t my wife and Gisèle come home yet?”

“But you know that today is their day for good works,” Jacques said. “Parcels for P.O.W.s, Propagation of the Faith, Christmas fair, Christian schools, and the seminaries of the diocese,” he rattled off without a pause.

He went toward the mantelpiece, opened a cigarette box and dipped his hand into it.

“Pass me one too, please,” said Mme Costellot.

He handed her a cigarette and bent his tall, slender body to light it for her. In the semidarkness of the drawing room, the flash of the

lighter momentarily illuminated his sharp, delicate features, the rather worn face with the high cheekbones, the faint rings under the eyes, the scornful, hard mouth. It was a face that revealed intelligence, pride, and a touch of cruelty.

"It has always perplexed me," said M. Lardenne in a doleful voice, "why, with convinced, devoted, and active philanthropists like my wife and my daughter, the world has not yet reached a relative state of equilibrium—I might go so far as to say—a state of complete well-being and happiness." He let himself down onto a sofa and the springs squeaked. "The miles of scarves Emilienne has been knitting for the last forty years would easily cover the distance from Paris to Marseilles. She has made enough socks and vests to clothe all the naked. As to her constant and persistent efforts for the cause of the Propagation of the Faith, if they had been crowned with the success they deserve, the Hottentots and Papuans ought now to be the most fervent adepts of the Christian doctrine."

"Considering the Christians in Europe and America, this may well be the case," said Jacques.

"Right, my dear Jacques, very right. True religion has taken refuge in those wild regions that are designated on ancient maps with the inscription: *Hic sunt leones*. In Europe, alas, this distressful century will complete the systematic degradation of Christianity, the derision of its millenary values. The man of the West has been pleased to trample underfoot, yes, trample underfoot—" He did not finish his sentence but clasped his hands with a gesture full of horror and pity. "A new paganism is spreading over the world. It is a mockery, a leprosy that spreads to all of us from one to the other."

Jacques smiled. "Nevertheless, you must admit that we are quite comfortable, you and I, and you, too, mother, in the middle of this leprosy. We haven't much difficulty in resigning ourselves to the inevitable."

"I don't understand what you mean, either of you," Mme Costellot protested with energy. "Leprosy? What leprosy? You're really extraordinary. I don't feel in the least leprous, I assure you. My conscience is clear. Of course, if you are referring to the general deterioration of morals and to twentieth-century materialism, I agree with you. But only with reservations, with one very important reservation. The world is mad, we know that, and the part of the world infested by the Anglo-Saxons is particularly odious and particularly rotten, and what has rotted it is precisely the influence of the worst enemies of Christianity—the Jews. That part of the world should be shown on the map with the

inscription *Hic sunt* and the Latin names for jackals and hyenas: I don't know Latin. But France, in my opinion, France, if I am not mistaken, if I am not deluding myself, is not as rotten as that today, or is she? We have raised ourselves up again since 1940, or haven't we? France today is the cleanest place on the earth. At least, we have a leader who is clean."

The clasped hands, the old, puffy face, the high-pitched voice immediately expressed veneration and respectful emotion.

"Most certainly you are right, Marguerite. How right you are to remind me of the things that can sustain our hope and feed our courage. The Marshal. A gift of God, a providential blessing to our unhappy country. As long as we have this man at the wheel of our ancient ship, this honest, upright man at the wheel of the ancient ship that is almost wrecked—"

"Shouldn't we sing '*Maréchal, vous voilà*'?" Jacques suggested briskly.

"Make fun as much as you like!" cried Mme Costellot. "That's easy. But stop to think for a moment where you would be at the present hour if the Marshal had not been here in 1940. And even if the Marshal were not here now. You might well find yourself in Hamburg or in Kiel, exposed to Anglo-American bombing. You know it, of course, but you don't want to admit it. I cannot understand your cynicism, your irony, your scorn. If one did not know you, one might sometimes take you for a Communist or—a Gaullist! But as you jeer at them too and despise them just as bitterly, I wonder what you really think and feel, what your guts are made of. Perhaps you consider yourself above partisan politics? Withdrawn to an ivory tower? That's all very fine, my boy. The only trouble is that one has to make a choice: nowadays one has to be on one side or the other. It is no longer a moral problem—although my choice, and I hope M. Lardenne's as well, is primarily dictated by moral considerations. It is above all a question of personal safety, of life and death, or very nearly. I'm being realistic—I'm not afraid of words. So, my lad, you are clever enough to recognize which is the good side, the safe side, the side not only of the just but—let us be realistic, even cynical—the side of the smart ones. It is the side of the Marshal. The Marshal chose his side at Montoire and has done so more and more clearly and openly ever since Montoire, and he has good reasons for it, you can be sure."

"I have always admired your perspicacity, mother, but I must confess that you would really be quite extraordinary if you had complete insight

into the reasons that govern the Marshal's behavior. Supposing, of course, that he has reasons. There is no end to the senseless discussions as to whether he thinks this or that, whether he has been won over by Germany or whether he is playing a double game. But my personal opinion is that he does not think at all."

"In other words, that he is senile?"

"If you like to put it that way."

M. Lardenne raised his hands to his face. "Jacques!" he murmured reproachfully.

"And I would go further still," continued the young man. "Look at the maudlin comedy that is being played in France today: the visits of the victor of Verdun to the martyr cities; acclamations to order for the 'grand old man,' kids presenting him with posies, craftsmen with examples of their craft in wood or copper; idiotic refrains bleated in the schools; tricolor portraits; Frankish battle-axes in shop windows denuded of everything else; the opportune and comforting revival of Péguy and of Corneille, the whole sickening display of sentimentality, the maudlin comedy around an old fellow in his second childhood who imagines himself to be the Maid of Orleans—you will pardon me, but I find it grotesque and hypocritical, and I beg your permission to hold aloof."

"Jacques!" said M. Lardenne again, genuinely distressed.

"Reassure yourself, Victor," Mme Costellot said virulently. "That's a role he fancies, the superior skeptic, you know. Jacques is still young, very young. He poses. But he'll sing another tune pretty soon, you'll see—if the Russians should start advancing, for instance—" She looked at her son, her eyes sparkling, her lips drawn in a hard smile. "How about it, my little Jacques, if the Russians were to start getting their own back, if the Soviets threatened to pour across Europe and came to throw a discreet glance at your income. Wouldn't you be converted to better sentiments?" She turned to M. Lardenne. "It is easy enough to pose as a playboy. But don't worry, dear Victor, we have common sense in spite of everything." She tapped her forehead with a scarlet, shining nail. "No bats in the belfry yet!"

Jacques shrugged his shoulders.

"My pleasant little pose is not so easy. For, to judge by the trend of events, it looks as if the Soviets, as you say, will not take long to start getting their own back."

"Are you alluding to the landing in Africa?"

She called M. Lardenne to witness. "Jacques has always more or less

believed in an Anglo-American victory. Since this morning, he is quite convinced of it."

She made a contemptuous gesture. "The landing in Africa! Nothing but bluff, my son. Wait a couple of weeks. We'll talk about it again."

M. Lardenne seemed to be deeply grieved by the turn the conversation had taken. He was a gentle peace-loving man, who harbored only good sentiments, noble and elevated sentiments. The violence and cynicism of the younger generation distressed him. He sighed and waved his hands.

"Children," he begged, "children, do not torment yourselves about things that we don't understand, that we cannot alter, nor even judge. Let us place our trust in God."

He rose to his feet, a massive, wavering silhouette. Then he pulled a bellpull near the door and pressed the switch. The great room was flooded with the harsh radiance of the electric light.

"It's more cheerful like this," murmured M. Lardenne. "And as my wife and daughter are definitely not coming back, we'll ask Marie to make us some tea. I feel inclined to enjoy a nice cup of tea. Tea rests one. It is a true relaxation for the soul—a nice cup of tea, with a few slices of toast. Dear me, I wonder if we have enough sugar for the rest of the month?"

"You know very well that you have never gone short of sugar," said Mme Costellot.

5.

THAT EVENING, the Count wore the preoccupied and strained expression of a man about to clear up a sinister mystery. He was holding an envelope in his left hand and tugging at his short mustache with the thumb and index finger of his right. His bushy eyebrows were contracted.

"Ah, here you are," he said gloomily as Francis opened the door of the drawing room. "Sit down, sir."

From this mode of address and the *grand siècle* formality of his reception, Francis understood that a disagreeable interview was to follow. With a resigned glance at his father, he sat down, crossed his hands on his knees and waited.

M. de Balansun drew two or three deep breaths, as though hoping to calm his inner agitation. He rubbed his nose with his forefinger, hastily

brushed away a few particles of dust that had settled on his cuff and examined his nails. Then, carefully avoiding to look at the boy sitting opposite him, he let his eyes roam to the ceiling and began to speak with the obvious intention of remaining cold and impersonal.

"Strange reports have reached us about you, reports that have plunged us, your mother and myself, into great consternation. Conjectures of the most disquieting nature have occurred to us; and, in our ignorance of the facts, we have been led to fear that our authority has been undermined and the honor of our name tarnished. We hope and pray that the truth may not be worse than we fear in our cruel anxiety. I presume, sir, that you understand what I am referring to? And I demand that you explain immediately and with utmost circumspection."

"What are you referring to, papa?"

M. de Balansun quivered from head to foot. His eyes remained fixed obstinately on the festoons and moldings decorating the wall.

"I would request you, sir, not to employ a diminutive tolerated by parental affection until I am convinced that you are worthy of pronouncing it."

"I don't understand what it's all about, sir," Francis amended submissively.

"You really do not understand?" said the lawyer. "In that case, we will ask you to examine the letter which has been addressed to us by M. l'Abbé Damestoy, the principal of your school. We are referring, sir, to your frequent and unexplained absences from the classes you are supposed to attend."

"I have no intention of deceiving you, sir."

The Count started. Addressing himself to the chandelier, he exclaimed, "He has no intention of deceiving us!"

Unable to contain himself any longer, he rose and walked round the table. When he returned to Francis, he stopped suddenly and brandished the letter.

"Nevertheless, that is what you have been doing for the last two months, sir!" he cried in the tone of someone who has thrown self-control to the winds.

"I'll explain everything," Francis murmured.

The Count sat down again in his easy chair and began to drum his fingers on the table absent-mindedly.

"He will explain everything to us," he repeated, this time to the Venetian mirror.

"It is true that I have missed classes two or three times since the be-

ginning of the term," Francis said. "I should have asked your permission, but I was afraid you might refuse it."

"I must, therefore, conclude that the use to which you put your leisure was not one you could readily confess," said M. de Balansun. He placed his hand on his heart and continued in a voice that had suddenly altered, "I am expecting the most surprising revelations. Are you going to admit, sir, that you have been visiting our farms in order to exercise those seignorial rights which, since the Revolution of '89, have been abolished, with other privileges? The age of seventeen has always been a critical one for the males of the Balansun family."

Francis smiled. "You seem to forget, sir, that we no longer own any farms."

"I had forgotten; that is so," he said sadly. "One does not accustom oneself too rapidly to reversals of fortune as sudden as they are unexpected." His expression became sardonic. "Am I then to understand that after the fashion of the young dandies of our town, in imitation of those pomaded young men who, I believe, are now known by the exotic sounding neologism (which might as well have been culled from a book on ornithology) as *les zazous*—in times when French was still spoken one would have called them simply *petits maîtres*—you went to pay democratic court to some little milliner or dressmaker or some other girl of low extraction and facile morals?"

"Nothing of the sort," said Francis. "I was getting travelers across the line."

"I beg your pardon?" said M. de Balansun, with a start.

"I was getting travelers across the line."

"The line?"

The solicitor, whose imagination had immediately invoked, not the demarcation line, but the 'crossing of the line,' that is to say the equator, and the traditional jests of sailors on this occasion, now felt that his mind was giving way.

"Crossing the line," he stammered. "The travelers—"

"Yes, I have taken men who were in danger across to the Free Zone. Hunted men."

M. de Balansun felt that the world had righted itself again, although it seemed no less mysterious.

"Hunted men?" he exclaimed in profound amazement. "And who might have been hunting them, I should like to know?"

"The Germans."

"The Germans?" repeated M. de Balansun, becoming more and more bewildered.

"You seem to forget that we are in an occupied country, and that the police are on the track of certain suspects."

The Count's face assumed a look of horror and consternation. "Do you mean to tell me, sir, that you have become the accomplice of escaped criminals?" he articulated with difficulty.

"It is not a question of helping escaped criminals," Francis said gently. He hesitated, trying to find a precise definition that was neither too dramatic nor too grandiloquent, and yet noble enough to impress his father. It was not easy. "They are perfectly honorable men," he continued. A flush rose to his cheeks. "Their only crime is that they refuse to be slaves," he murmured, forcing himself to pronounce this phrase, which sounded as unconvincing as a cue given by a bad actor.

M. de Balansun inserted a finger between his neck and his collar, as though to relieve his overheated brain; he felt that it might burst at any moment.

"They refuse to be slaves?" he repeated in a faint voice. "I am afraid I do not quite follow you."

"Listen. Just now there are a number of men who, for different reasons, must escape into the Free Zone. I have helped a few of them cross the line, because they were unfamiliar with the countryside and because I know it well. That is why I have been absent from school."

M. de Balansun rose and walked round the room several times, to regain his equanimity. After about a minute, he seemed to be himself again.

"I am not quite convinced," he said gloomily, "that this occupation can be qualified as respectable from every point of view. Who are these men who are so intolerant that they cannot conform to a military occupation to which France had to consent and whose legitimacy she has recognized by signing the armistice?"

"Men holding the most varied shades of opinion, with quite different kinds of background, but all united by the same—ideal."

"And what is that ideal?"

"To liberate the country," said Francis. He felt like laughing and blushing at the same time. The dialogue was really becoming impossible.

But the sublime was M. de Balansun's spiritual home. He closed his eyes and again laid his hand on his heart. The last words appeared to

have touched the patriotic chords that vibrated there. "A noble idea, certainly," he declared with emotion, "but a rash undertaking that, I fear, is certainly doomed to fail."

"Nothing could be less certain, that's just it. Surely you have heard the latest news?"

"The latest news?"

"The Allied landing in Africa."

"That deplorable incident had certainly not struck me as a forerunner of an Anglo-Saxon victory," the Count declared disdainfully.

"Just wait two weeks and you will see."

"We will see. But in the meanwhile, we must return to the question that is now being discussed. So I understand that you have missed your classes in order to assist certain suspect individuals to cross the demarcation line?"

"That is so."

"I have every reason to surmise that these deserters belong to extremist political parties and, to put it plainly, move in the orbit of anarchy. Would you please tell me what their other activities are, once we have taken their mania for local displacement for granted? How do they plan to combat the occupying forces?"

"They have several ways of doing it."

"Could you mention one?"

"Well—derailing trains, for instance."

The Count, who was walking up and down in the drawing room, with his hands behind his back, was so startled that he nearly came to grief on the slippery floor. He exclaimed indignantly, "And what motives, will you tell me, drive your friends to such strange aberrations?"

"But, papa, just think it over: German armored trains, carrying war material or troops—"

M. de Balansun stood pondering, a finger on his lips, wrinkling his brow. He pondered for a long time gravely, like a man who is in the habit of examining a problem from every possible angle.

"That is true," he said at last. "But nevertheless, excesses of this kind cannot fail to remind me of the terrible disorders that took place during the Bolshevik revolution."

"Obviously they cannot choose their methods," said Francis. "Besides, these men have made up their minds to liberate the country. *They* are patriots," he added stiffly.

M. de Balansun nearly jumped out of his skin.

"Do you mean to insinuate," he exclaimed, "that my own patriotism

is failing. No man, I assure you, sir, no man has suffered more than I from the cruel humiliation of our defeat. But I would never have thought," he continued truculently, "that the honor of my country demanded that I should place infernal machines on the rails of our railway system, or romp across the fields in the company of the most suspicious elements of the French population. Besides, neither my age nor my functions would permit me to indulge in pranks like these."

"Papa," said Francis, "I had expected more understanding from you."

The lawyer breathed noisily.

"I have allowed my indignation to run away with me, I admit," he said. "Let us be calm. Let us look at the matter quite coldly." He assumed an expression worthy of a police inspector.

"Was the young man you introduced to me as a former scout one of these—patriots?"

"Yes."

"His name was not Martineau at all, I presume?"

"No. I only know his *nom de guerre*: the Mohican."

"His *nom de guerre*! The Mohican!" Overwhelmed, the old man struck his forehead. "So we're back in the world of Fenimore Cooper!" he cried. "Good old Fenimore Cooper! The warpath, the Indian chief, the arrows poisoned with *curare*, Black Bison, Red Serpent, and the daughter of the Incas!" He planted himself in front of Francis and said in a pitying, brokenhearted tone, "My poor boy, you are really a little too old to indulge in fun and games of this kind!"

"Fun and games!" murmured Francis. "So you think it's fun and games. You would be surprised to hear that men go to jail or are shot for this kind of fun." He got up, went across to his father and leaned his head against the old man's shoulder. "Papa, try to understand. And drop the grand style, the sarcastic style, the Bossuet style, the Voltaire style, and all the rest of it," he said humorously. "These things you call fun and games or childish pranks are pretty dangerous. I repeat if someone were to inform against me, I myself would probably be thrown in prison. Not shot, no, I don't think so, what I am doing isn't important enough, but put in prison."

"In prison!" M. de Balansun threw his arms around the boy. "My son, I am trembling," he stammered. "Do you really believe that such a thing is possible?"

"It happens every day, papa." Francis nodded his head and smiled. "You have no idea of the times in which you are living—"

"But, after all," cried M. de Balansun, "will you be good enough to

tell me why you got yourself mixed up in all this? What made you bring this hornets' nest about your ears?"

Dropping his arms from his son's shoulders, M. de Balansun stepped back and, visibly anxious to reassume the dignified and severe attitude that a moment of emotion had broken down, he went to lean against the wall under the portrait of one of his ancestors.

"Papa," said Francis, with a hint of reproach in his tone, "you ask me why I should wish to take part in the struggle against the forces of occupation or at least assist those who are working for the liberation of our country. *You* ask me that, you, a Balansun!"

The shot had hit home. The Count closed his eyes and gasped for breath. Francis had been expecting this reaction and suppressed a smile. His father came close to him, seized his hand, and pressed it convulsively, keeping his eyes on the ground.

"Forgive me," he said, "forgive me. Carried away by the vehemence of my emotion, I had actually lost sight of the greatness that has always been associated with our name and that is inscribed on our arms in letters of fire. You have reminded me of it. I am overwhelmed!"

Francis intended to make the most of his advantage. "Surely," he said, "when Jean-Demosthène-Martin wanted to join the army of the Maréchal de Saxe, his father did not ask him why he wanted to get mixed up in that affair."

M. de Balansun made a grimace. He did not enjoy this ill-timed reference to a none too glamorous forebear, the deplorable gunner of Fontenoy.

"I would not go so far as to say that the example is well chosen," he remarked petulantly, "nor that it is convincing and can clinch the argument. But I admit the soundness of the principle implied."

He sat down again and signed to his son to take the second easy chair.

"Well, after this lengthy and enlightening discussion, our positions are appreciably modified. You now have before you no longer a stern judge but an attentive father, who asks nothing better than to be allowed to second you in the admirable, though daring, task you have undertaken, propelled by a patriotic zeal that cannot fail to arouse in me a feeling of legitimate pride."

He really was proud, and not only proud, but burning with childish curiosity. Francis would have liked to give him a kiss. The old man's agitation, his flashing eyes, the nervous gestures with which he tugged at his mustache were so many indications of his state of excitement, like a man who suddenly finds himself caught up in a thrilling story and

longs to learn its main events and their as yet unsuspected sequels. M. de Balansun had only the haziest notions of the tragic reality in the midst of which he and his contemporaries lived and struggled. He vaguely believed—that is to say, he had believed up to this moment—that the state of the world was more or less settled: Germany would beat the “Soviet-Judaic-Saxon coalition.” It was merely a matter of time. He had believed in a new Europe, in which France, regenerated by the virtues of the Marshal, would occupy an honorable position, even though only as a secondary power. This calm certainty, the natural outcome of a whole system of intellectual and emotional reflexes, which were those of his caste, his family, his education, and his traditions, had been justified and even exalted in M. de Balansun’s eyes after June, 1940, by the prodigious authority of a “great man”—the Marshal. The Count had immediately become a spontaneous and unquestioning follower of the program of *la France nouvelle*, just as thousands and thousands of good, honest men had done all over France. He was a “collaborator” free from passion or vice. Although he still looked upon the Germans as the “hereditary enemy,” nevertheless he believed that an understanding with the masters of the Reich was the lesser evil, the only hope for the country, the most reasonable, and the safest solution of the problem. Of course, he did not accept it joyfully, for he felt the abstract, verbal, and automatic hatred of the Boche that, before the war, had been the basis of the political conceptions of so many Frenchmen. He liked to refer ironically to “Teutonic heaviness” and the “Germanic hordes,” and not for a kingdom would he have spoken to a German soldier. Fundamentally, his ideal would have been that of “France for the French,” an independent France, freed from any yoke (be it Semite, Saxon, or German), a picture-book France with cheerful barracks, sly draftees, flourishing colonies, the marches to the East, Clémenceau, the *esprit boulevardier*, and no separation of Church and State. He hoped that one day, in a new Europe where the Reich would have been finally humanized and subdued, this France, standing alone, independent, and strong would rise from her present humiliation and sorrow.

Provided that this mythical ideal of *la France seule* remained intact, M. de Balansun had no difficulty in modifying, according to the need, one or other of the secondary moves on his political chessboard. Therefore, as soon as he had at last understood that his son’s irregular activities were directed toward the final goal of liberating France, he was won over. Furthermore, his pride at knowing that a Balansun was taking part in so glorious an action, his childish delight in mysteries

and plots, his joy at having been made the confidant, soon perhaps the accomplice of heroic maneuvers, precipitated his conversion. It would have taken very little persuasion for him, who had a moment earlier scoffed derisively at the romantic aspects of the clandestine struggle, as it appeared to him in the light of his son's revelations, to assume—providing the circumstances were propitious—the most bombastic *nom de guerre*, to blow up the entire arsenal of the S.N.C.F., and to offer the German officer lodging in his house a broth that, even though not quite Spartan, would be discreetly seasoned with *curare* instead.

Nevertheless, this emotional conversion, which was chiefly dictated by his enthusiasm, had to be sanctioned by his reason as well. This was the object of the ensuing discussion, in the course of which all M. de Balansun's preconceived ideas were shaken and finally annihilated by his son's merciless dialectics. The Count clung obstinately to his ideas, partly from a kind of intellectual vanity—he did not want to give the impression of giving in too easily, or of being a weathercock—partly for argument's sake alone, so that he might indulge in “crushing repartee” and fine phrases, articulated according to the rules of Ciceronian syntax and delivered all in one breath—in short because of his disinterested love of the Word. And in his case, the Word was always of the greatest importance.

Francis spoke about the clandestine network that was gradually being established in France. As long as the Allies continued to resist the enemy, this network would continue to develop, and even in the unimaginable case of a final German victory, there was no reason to abandon the underground struggle. Had not the Spanish *guerrilleros* ended by disintegrating the shell of the Napoleonic armies? (This comparison impressed the Count deeply.) No, the longer you thought about it, the more readily you had to admit that the Armistice of 1940 was only a truce. (“But we signed!” moaned the Count.) General de Gaulle (“a misguided man!” he cried) General de Gaulle was reorganizing the French forces in England. Someday these new legions would unite with the Allies, when the latter had gained a foothold in Europe. (M. de Balansun laughed in a Mephistophelean manner, and with a loud “pish” dismissed the landing forces of the future.) Ho! ho! So papa did not believe in the landing? All right—he had only to wait. In any case, there was one factor one should not forget, the Russians. M. de Balansun grew pale as he declared that the monstrous mating of the (British) lion with the (Soviet) bear was more than the human mind could envisage. Pursuing his audacious metaphor, he predicted

sinister consequences from this unnatural union. He ranted against the "Tartar chief of the Kremlin." Francis countered that Delcassé's dearest wish would surely have been to bring about this enlarged *entente cordiale*, and that this eminent diplomat, had he lived, would certainly have been appointed Minister of the Interior for the provisional French Government in London. This statement plunged the Count into the torments of a mental conflict: all his ideas about Delcassé's historical figure were shaken and contradicted by this conception.

He was further enlightened as to the invaders with their official "correctitude." All he need do was to open his eyes and ears to understand that this correctness was the smoke screen that concealed arbitrary and cruel despotism: the Gestapo was the reverse of German correctness. The Count was deeply impressed and promised himself to keep his eyes open. Francis continued. Vichy? A shark pond, a whirlpool of intrigues around a reactionary, ambitious old man who, even before Montoire, ever since he had been Ambassador to Madrid, why, ever since the end of the first war, had sided with the enemies of the Republic, with Fascism and tyranny! M. de Balansun was very distressed—he could not jettison the Marshal so easily. But Francis continued his indictment mercilessly. The Marshal had shaken hands with Hitler. The Marshal had confessed that he hoped for a German victory. The Marshal had taken Laval with him and what was Laval? Exactly—the antithesis of Delcassé.

In the course of the discussion, M. de Balansun had in turn been ironical, violent, overwhelmed, cautious, and circumspect. This time he acknowledged himself beaten. Francis enlarged on the Free French forces, related a touching anecdote about the so-called "terrorists" and hinted at certain hopes for the near future. Then M. de Balansun became enthusiastic, moved, naïvely heroic. As a zealous neophyte, he begged for information of a precise and enlightening nature. Forgetting his own hard words about the "Tartar chief of the Kremlin" he implored Francis to tell him "frankly and without ambiguity" his own opinion on "Monsieur Stalin." Francis was sure that the "reactionaries" had purposely blackened the leader of that distant and avowedly rather disturbing democracy. It was really rather cheap to picture him as a muzhik holding a knife between his teeth. M. de Balansun, whose intellectual vigor was such that he refused to be harassed by propaganda, concurred that this was indeed very cheap. In any case, Francis went on, one could be sure that Stalin's ideology had undergone a peculiar evolution, having started with systematic Marxism in order to end with

nationalistic imperialism, which was, taking it by and large, much more reassuring. M. de Balansun agreed. Actually there was no denying that. Finally, Francis added, that to judge by appearances, it would seem that the Eastern ally of the Anglo-Americans must be an extraordinarily clever man, whose gifts were very nearly Machiavellian. M. de Balansun, who was prepared to excuse anything for the sake of diplomatic shrewdness, declared that he was delighted to admit M. Stalin to the level of Delcassé, and the Kremlin to that of the Foreign Office.

During this conversation, which ended in a much more friendly manner than it had begun, the Count had given vent to exclamations, such as "I am disillusioned!" or "My eyes are being opened!" or "the scales are falling!" He even made a confession not devoid of humility, although in the past tense: "I was an old fool!" to which he added some remarks of a more elevated nature: "But my son has shown me the right way!" and "This is a memorable day!"

Dusk was falling. Through the window one could see the dark street where the November mist was already spreading. Saint-Clar was obediently blacking-out its lights. On the opposite side of the street, two parallel streaks of blue light revealed that there were still some customers in the butcher's shop. It was chilly in the fireless drawing room. The solicitor's family had only their coal ration and did not possess sufficient funds to buy large quantities of wood, therefore only one part of the house was well heated—the kitchen. After six in the evening, the temperature in the Louis XVI salon became icy. Francis shivered.

"On this memorable day," said M. de Balansun, "it is fitting that we should depart from the stringent rules of economy that the present hard times impose on us."

He winked and went to open the sideboard, from which he took two glasses and a bottle of Armagnac that was three quarters empty. "I have been keeping these modest dregs for our traditional Christmas festivities. But the Lord will provide!"

They touched glasses. The Count raised his to France, to the final victory, and (with a knowing chuckle) to the brave Mohican. Francis told him of the Mohican's offer to procure news of Jean de Lavoncourt. Ah! how happy Hélène would be! They must let her know immediately. Not by letter, of course, that might be dangerous, there was always the possibility of letters being censored. But Francis had already thought of something: the Arréguy boy, papa must remember—Philippe Arréguy, who had gone to school with Francis? Well, Philippe was going to

Paris in two or three days. Yes, his parents had decided to send him to the *lycée* in Paris. It would be quite easy to send a message to Hélène through him. At the same time, they might send her a parcel. Francis would go and see the Arréguy's that very evening. He did not like going there very much, he had never crossed these people's threshold, but after all, for Hélène's sake. Ah! how happy she would be! If only the Mohican succeeded! If only there could be news of Jean one day! That would be marvelous.

"I have just thought of something!" exclaimed the solicitor, hitting his forehead with his hand. "Would it be wise to let your mother know of these important events? No. No, surely not. It is not," he continued with the emphasis that had become his habitual and natural way of expressing himself, "not that I fear one of those indiscretions arising from verbal incontinence to which the fair sex is always prone. My dear wife, thanks be to God, is free from this minor defect, which has been the source of countless catastrophes, as we can learn not only from many a *fabliau* set down by our good forefathers in medieval times, but also from several bloody episodes in history." The feminine propensity to gossip was a favorite theme of his jests. He had gathered a stock of picturesque catch phrases on this question and would draw on it liberally whenever the opportunity arose, especially with his old friend, the banker Lardenne. These two "*fins causeurs*" delighted in oratorical tourneys that were highly appreciated in Saint-Clar society. "A nimble tongue is one more charm in our mistresses, but a plague in our wives!" he exclaimed with sparkling eyes. This formula that, with a score of others, was one of the high lights of his repertoire, had earned him a local reputation for audacity and paradoxical wit, sharpened by Parisian experience and the habits of a man about town. Suddenly remembering that he was not talking to M. Lardenne but to Francis, he pulled himself up short, gave a little cough and continued in a more sober tone. "In any case, it will be better for us to remain silent about our activities. Your mother's sensibility and frantic solicitude would find too many grounds for alarm in our existence as clandestine combatants." And with a manly gesture he dismissed the sensibility and solicitude of Mme de Balansun. "Things such as these must be kept among men. Tacitus said something very striking about it. I regret that a failing memory does not permit me to reconstitute the quotation exactly."

He laid his hand on Francis' shoulder. "These things must remain between men," he repeated.

"It is half past six," said Francis, looking at his watch. "I've still got time to go and see the Arréguys before dinner."

He looked at his father and suppressed a smile; the old man had assumed a serious and concentrated expression as he sipped the last drops of his glass of Armagnac. Francis threw his arms round his father's neck and kissed his cheek.

"Papa, I am so pleased that you know about it. I hated having to hide so much from you. You have been grand, papa. But remember, not a word about this to anyone, no matter who."

"You don't have to remind me of the need for discretion, of which I have only now stressed the importance."

"All right, don't get annoyed. Go and rest before dinner. You look tired."

"Far from resting, I will now go for a walk and, by taking some exercise, calm a nervous exaltation that might otherwise betray me this evening."

"All right. I'm going to see Philippe Arréguy."

M. de Balansun held his son close for a moment.

"I, too, am pleased," he murmured, "and I am proud of you, my son. Truly I am proud."

Then he suddenly stepped back and raised his glass, in which a last drop of Armagnac was still sparkling. He looked Francis straight in the eye and exclaimed: "*Toujours plus haut!*"

6.

"MA!" called Philippe from his room on the first floor.

"What do you want?" shouted his mother from the kitchen.

"Where did you stick my white shirt?"

"With the others."

"Tain't there, ma. Where did you put it?"

"You drive me nuts!" shouted Mme Arréguy. "Asking me where your white shirt is, at seven o'clock at night, when I've got to cook supper. If you can't find it, take one of your father's."

"But the neck's too tight, ma, you know that."

"What a damned nuisance that brat is. And to begin with, what d'you want your white shirt for?"

"I'm going to the movies tonight."

"Who with?"

"With Janine Ituralde."

"That little bitch!" she exclaimed, suddenly furious. "I won't have you going out with that little tart."

"She isn't a tart, ma. She doesn't sleep with anybody 'cept me."

Fernande Arréguy was standing beside the kitchen range, a pot of fat in her right hand, a fork in her left. The blue paper lampshade restricted the light to a circular patch in the center of the kitchen, leaving the walls, the door, and the carefully blacked-out window in shadow. Only the grate of the kitchen stove, like the mouth of a miniature hell, spread a crimson glow, in which the woman's face appeared in sculptural relief. When the young masculine voice from the floor above shouted the last sentence, Mme Arréguy's eyelids suddenly drooped and the dark hollows of her cheeks quivered. Her face in the lurid firelight was the motionless sculptured face of a lost soul. Almost immediately, the eyelids opened again to reveal eyes gleaming now with a bitter mirth. Mme Arréguy's voice was both hissing and deep.

"Little stinker," she said. "You're just like all the men. She's no tart because she only sleeps with you. Go on, you little bastard."

She gave a short, shrill laugh and waited for a retort. Above the sound of footsteps and of drawers being opened and shut informed her that her son was hunting frantically for his shirt.

"Oh! stay the way you are!" she yelled. "Janine will surely take you like that. With a mug like yours, no girl gives a damn about your collar."

A smile lifted the corners of her mouth and she mumbled some incomprehensible words to herself. Then she dipped the fork into the fat and rubbed it on the frying pan on the range. The fat sizzled. The only sounds in the night-enveloped house were this tiny sizzling and an elastic, heavy step on the boards of the first floor. Outside, beyond the window covered with its blue paper, the entire little town was wrapped in the nocturnal fog like a thick layer of cotton. Yet all the while a thousand invisible and silent cries, imprecations and vociferations crackled along the wave lengths, issuing from every part of the world and forming a web of furious presences over the town. Into the warm interiors of the kitchens that were isolated from the outer darkness by curtains or paper-covered windows, one or other of these presences insinuated itself, to be regulated and muzzled by cautious hands. Tenuous vociferations, Lilliputian rages, gently buzzing diatribes, caught by a wire

somewhere above the roofs, flowed into the kitchens out of small cubic boxes and were received sometimes with passionate interest, sometimes with the indifference of long habit.

Outside, the night, the fog, and rays of blue light filtering through the darkness—under the roofs, the warm, muffled, teeming life of an anthill. The main street of the town was deserted. Deserted, icy, spell-bound like a lunar landscape—except where three pair of boots struck the pavement with a slow, heavy rhythm. Black leather boots that at this moment suddenly gleamed in the blue cone of light from a street lamp. The heel of one of those boots splashed into a little puddle of black water and the water spilled over the paving stones. This slow, resounding, heavy rhythm and the flash of the shining leather under the blue cone of the street lamp were the only connection between the life under the roofs and the night outside. No—for there was no connection, because nothing could be more separate, more solitary than the slow robotlike hammering. The three robots passed on, moving without haste along the dark streets, solitary, separate, completely inhuman. They were not part of the night or the fog. On either side of their path the bare walls rose up, the heavy, barred doors of the houses, the thick shells of stone and iron behind which, in the light of a lamp, men and women were listening to the clamor of the world.

Mme Arréguy was not interested in the rages or the calls of the world. While the potatoes were frying in the pan, she turned on the radio. Petulantly, she annihilated one after the other the voices of London, of Boston, of Stuttgart, who had all tried to insinuate themselves into her kitchen. She took the Ninth Symphony in her stride and made a detour around a talk on the present conditions of agriculture. Then a familiar song burst on her ears: Mme Arréguy, satisfied at last, joined in, humming the words:

*Bel amour,
Bel amant,
Bel ami.*

She returned to the stove, shook the potatoes and, sticking the fork in one of them, lifted it to her mouth; not yet cooked enough. She set three plates on the table, laid out the cutlery, and brought a bottle of wine.

*Bel amour,
Bel amant,
Bel ami.*

She liked that song. When she pronounced the word *amour*, she rolled the "r" deep down in her throat, growling softly like a happy animal. She even executed a dance step between the table and the stove.

Philippe came pounding down the stairs and opened the door from the passage. Mme Arréguy, standing erect in the infernal red glow, turned toward that door.

"I've found the shirt, ma. You put it with pa's in his room." His tall figure could just be seen beyond the luminous zone of the electric light bulb.

"Come here," said Fernande, "so I can see how handsome you are."

He advanced into the room. She pushed the hanging bulb up to the ceiling. The broad shoulders, the white-clad chest, and a young face emerged from the shadows. Mme Arréguy took the boy's head between both her hands and gazed at him for a time in silent admiration.

"Christ, but you are handsome!" she murmured at last. Then she sighed, "Fixing yourself up like that for a filthy little bitch!"

"Ma!"

"You disgusting little swine, you're off to Paris the day after tomorrow and you can't even stay at home the last two evenings. You're going away for two months. I won't see you again before Christmas and you can't even devote the last evenings to your family. When I say your family, I mean myself, of course. Your father—that's a different story. Besides, he hasn't even grasped that you're going. But I—I—I'm your pal, aren't I? Have I stopped being your little pal of a ma, eh? You didn't find time to take me even once to the movies all summer. You've thrown me out like a worn old shoe."

"That's not true, ma."

She was still holding the young curly head between her hands. She drew it toward her mouth, inhaling the fresh smell of soap on his cheeks and the nape of his neck, and the secret, warm, musky scent of his hair.

"Listen to him protesting! You'd think butter wouldn't melt in his mouth! You'd think he was a little mama's boy about to make his First Communion. Say what you like! A little beast who runs round the movie houses with babes, at seventeen, and doesn't give a damn about his family. I hope you'll change your ways in Paris. I've written to your aunt Eliane that she's to keep an eye on you. And if you dare waste your time at Janson, I'll stick you in as a boarder with twenty francs a week pocket money. D'you hear? As a boarder. You'll be locked up, my little man."

"I'll work, ma."

"You bet you will—or else. And I want you to graduate. After that, you'll get along. I'm not worried. With your kind of mug, one always gets along in Paris and everywhere else. But I warn you—no fooling around. As to women, use them, have fun with them, and that's that. Don't spend a penny on them, not a cent. And don't take them seriously. Neither cash nor tears, d'you understand. They're not worth it, the whole lot of them. And when it comes to men—be polite, but on the lookout. Don't let them push you around. When anyone gets fresh with you, man or woman, smack 'em in the face. D'you understand?"

"Yes, ma."

"'Yes, ma, yes, ma,' says he, with his little Parisian accent. Ah! When it comes to looking as good as gold—" She passed a finger over his smooth chin. "So I can't be the first to try that beard this evening? One no longer kisses Mother Arréguy? She's too old, I s'pose. One keeps oneself for Janine?"

He smiled and his teeth gleamed in the crimson dusk. They were both now standing beside the kitchen stove. Philippe slid his hands under Mme Arréguy's shoulders, stooped over her and buried his face in her neck, in the V-shaped opening of her dress. Playfully he nibbled at her skin. She struggled halfheartedly, her head thrown back, a little ripple of laughter rising deep down in her chest.

"You're tickling me— Idiot, I didn't ask you to bite me! Stop it, I say—"

He did not move and remained with his mouth fastened to her skin below her shoulder. She closed her eyes and once again her face was like that of a lost soul, sculptured and immobile between the reflection of the flames and the deep shadows.

Suddenly she shook herself free with a brusque movement and pushed him away.

"Go along, leave me alone and sit down. My potatoes smell burned."

Bel amour,
Bel amant,
Bel ami.

The song ended on a long drawn out, languishing chord. In the ensuing silence, they heard two timid knocks at the door.

"Who can it be?" murmured Fernande. "It can't be Werner, he's on sentry duty tonight."

"I'll go see," said Philippe.

It was not Werner, the friend of the family, but a young stranger whose silhouette appeared in frame of the door.

"Hello," said Philippe calmly, "Francis, this is a surprise! It's ages since I've seen you."

Fernande Arréguy, immediately on guard and mistrustful, studied the slim form emerging from the night and the fog. She knew Francis vaguely. Philippe and he, when they were small boys, had gone to school together and played pelota in front of the house. Nevertheless, he was a stranger, "one of the high-ups," as she used to say, indicating by this expression all the people in Saint-Clar who either did not know her and her family or who refused to know them. What did he want today, the little snob, the priests' fair-haired boy? Besides, it was dinner-time. The potatoes were done, and before the old man came home she had hoped to have her son to herself for half an hour. What did this unwelcome young man want?

"Come in," said Philippe. "It's freezing outside. Sit down."

"Please excuse me for coming so late," said Francis. "I hope I am not disturbing you?"

He was so shy and embarrassed that his voice was unsteady.

"Not at all," said Philippe, "I am alone with *maman*."

In the dim red glow of the stove, Francis now distinguished the motionless form of a woman.

"Oh! I beg your pardon," he exclaimed, "I didn't see you. How do you do, Madame Arréguy?"

He moved toward her, holding out his hand. She was still holding the fork in her right hand. She didn't move and continued to look at the boy for a few seconds. Then she said in a husky voice, which sounded surly and slightly more vulgar than usual, "Oh! We do all right. Now, if you don't mind, we're going to eat. Supper's ready."

"Oh! please," stammered Francis, dropping his arm. "Please don't let me disturb you. I—I'm awfully sorry."

One could hear him swallowing his saliva.

"All right, all right, no harm done," said Mme Arréguy. "Sit down."

With a movement of her chin, she indicated a chair. Then, either because she regretted her rudeness or because she felt that, for Philippe's sake, she must counteract the bad impression she had made, she filled a glass with wine and handed it to Francis.

"It's not an *apéritif*, it's heavy red wine, but it warms you in weather like this."

Francis, who never drank anything but water and did not like red wine, accepted with a lively show of gratitude.

"Thank you so much. To your very good health!" he said as he raised the glass. He drank a sip. "What excellent wine!"

"Not bad," conceded Mme Arréguy. "And it ought to be good, at thirty-five francs a bottle." She turned to her son, "What are you waiting for? Start feeding your face! You'll be too late for your date."

Philippe sat down.

Mme Arréguy turned to Francis and said: "That little bastard is going to Paris the day after tomorrow, but do you think he's staying home tonight to keep his mother company? Nothing of the sort! He's going to the pictures with a tart. Would you act like that if you were in his place?"

"Ma, it's normal at my age, isn't it?" said Philippe.

"At your age! Ask the young man if he wouldn't stay with his mother two days before leaving his family?"

"Francis and me, we aren't kids any more," Philippe said with a good-natured smile.

"All the same, you are still sons," she retorted morosely. "And I'm sure the young man has better sentiments than you have."

Francis had blushed up to the roots of his hair and wriggled in his chair. So as not to be forced to answer, he drank another sip of wine. Then in a few words, he explained the purpose of his visit. A comrade who had crossed over into the Free Zone that afternoon had offered to make inquiries about Lavoncourt, from whom there had been no news for a long time. (He omitted to say that he had made it possible for the "comrade" to cross over into the Free Zone.) As one never knew whether a letter might be opened by the German censorship, he had thought that Philippe might inform Hélène. Lavoncourt was Hélène's fiancé.

"If it isn't too much to ask you, Philippe?"

"Not at all, chum. I'll go and see her the day after I arrive."

"I have put down her address for you, here it is. And still another thing—you must excuse me for presuming on your kindness—could you take a parcel for her? It's quite a small parcel."

"But, of course, with pleasure."

"Thank you. It would be best if you could go and see her after six o'clock. My sister works nearly every day in a laboratory."

Even while he was speaking, he regretted that he had come. He felt

horribly ill at ease. It would have been quite safe to write to H       and say something like "We may soon be having news from Jean" without going into details. They could have told her the whole story when she came home for the Christmas holidays. Why the devil had he thought of sending Philippe to see her? He could just as well have waited and avoided this disagreeable visit to people who were complete strangers to him. He had been a fool. Why had he complicated a quite simple matter so unnecessarily? Probably because it had been such an exciting day and then this unexpected hope of getting in touch with Jean again. He had not been able to restrain himself; he wanted H       to share that hope as soon as possible. That was it. He was too impulsive, lacking in *sang froid* and forethought.

Mme Arr       was very interested in the affair; everything connected with the relations between the sexes interested her. In the tone of a society lady politely expressing compassion, she said, "So those poor young things have been separated all this time? Hardly engaged, they had to separate and now no news. How sad that is. I pity them from the bottom of my heart! . . . This stinking war!" she exclaimed suddenly.

Although this protest against the disasters of the present time had not been expressed in the language of good society, Francis agreed wholeheartedly.

"How right you are, Mme Arr      . Soon it will have lasted two years . . ."

He expatiated on the commonplaces of war—bomber raids, burning cities, the paralysis and suffocation of life, prisoners, difficulties of transport, problems of provisioning— These subjects never failed to awaken interest. When you had nothing else to say, they were useful and even better than remarks of a meteorological nature.

"Yes," concluded Mme Arr      , with brooding fury, "they're a damned nuisance, all of them. Let them push each other's faces in, the English and the Boches, without screwing up the whole lousy world."

However, she brightened at the mention of the Marshal. Her eyes shone and she laughed her piercing laugh, as she asked, "Heard the latest story?"

"No," said Francis, with a slight misgiving.

"Ma," interrupted Philippe. "Surely you're not going to repeat that filthy smut!"

"Well, you're not kids any longer; you said so yourself."

She proceeded to tell the latest story. It was a barroom joke, an ob-

scene pun on the names of Pétain, Darlan, and Laval. She laughed till she cried as she repeated it. Francis, scarlet in the face, made an heroic effort to smile.

"You shouldn't have, ma," said Philippe, in an indulgently reproachful tone.

"Oh, I almost split a gut. You've got to laugh now and then. If you don't laugh at all those bastards who order us around, life wouldn't be funny. There'd be nothing left but to jump into the Gave."

She wiped her eyes, still dim with hilarious tears, and offered Francis a dish of nuts.

"Take some. It was a good story, wasn't it?"

"Very good," said Francis.

He was studying them both, the woman and the boy, as they sat at the table under the light of the lamp, lifted out of the night by that harsh illumination. They were like two magnificent animals—a tigress and her cub. The woman was strongly built, her body was still young and vigorous and she seemed to radiate a restless vitality which she only just succeeded in controlling. She had a tragic face, ravaged by years of passion, wildness, and suffering; eyes that were almost black and could, at times, be velvety and tender, at others, flashing and cruel; and a large mouth like an open wound. Her make-up was carelessly slapped on, like that of a bad actress, and when she spoke, she tossed the black wavy mane of her tousled hair. Her hands were beautiful. This woman, who talked like a fishwife or like the wanton she had been in her youth, had the hands of a Madonna, delicate, supple, intelligent hands with long tapering fingers that appeared almost transparent against the light. Her son also had beautiful hands—they resembled those of a Castilian nobleman, a knight of Toledo in a picture by El Greco. Francis looked down at his own hands: the big, red, awkward hands of a healthy schoolboy, stained with ink, their palms callused as happens to pelota players. He thought of his little friend Marie-Anne, who had such very pretty hands, somehow so touching—and he decided that from now on he would take better care of his own hands. But how did one do it? He would never have the nerve to go to Mme Coryse Salomé, *Parfumerie-Salon de Coiffure-Dames*, and ask her for something to beautify the hands. No! never! He shivered at the very idea. Mme Coryse Salomé was awe-inspiring; like a movie star, all powder and rouge, lacquer, peroxide, and nail polish; rather as one would imagine the statue of feminine vanity illuminating the world. She also had breasts one could not look at without blushing, like a pair of small forts

aiming their cannon at you. Decidedly, Francis would have been less afraid of confronting a dinosaur than Mme Coryse Salomé. He looked at Philippe's mother.

"What lovely hands you have, Mme Arréguy."

She started and Philippe, who was peeling an apple, stopped with his knife in mid-air. They both seemed to be saying, "What's come over him?" Francis wished he were dead. At last Mme Arréguy smiled complacently. She was probably thinking, "He's trying to be nice: they have taught him that you must be gallant toward a lady." Besides, the unexpected compliment pleased her, chiefly because of Philippe.

"Yes, my little lad," she said familiarly, "I've been told that before. I used to know a gentleman, he always said 'Fernande, she's got the hands of a duchess,' and it's not that I take much care of them. I never stop doing chores from morning to night."

"Ah! so you don't take much care of them?"

"I rub them with a little Hyalomiel from time to time, that's all."

"Hyalomiel," Francis repeated thoughtfully. "Hyalomiel . . ."

"But there's nothing much in it," Mme Arréguy explained. "It just keeps them from getting too rough, that's all. Either one has nice hands or ugly hands. It's breeding," she concluded proudly.

"That must be true," Francis told himself. He looked at the couple sitting opposite to him. It was extraordinary. Probably the blood of some remote Navarrese or Basque ancestor, or some great corsair or bandit flowed in their veins. They had the savage slenderness, the golden tan, and the dazzling teeth of the pure Basque type. Philippe, beside his mother like a cub beside a tigress, also radiated vitality and force, but a tranquil, self-assured force that made him appear almost lazy. Francis admired these two creatures, but his admiration was strangely devoid of liking or sympathy. He was too intensely aware of the vast distance that separated him from them; a distance which was not caused by the difference of class (Francis was not afflicted with class consciousness) but by the fact that their very nature was alien to him. Face to face with Mme Arréguy and her son, young Balansun felt himself shrinking, not exactly with hostility, but with a malaise that hardly stopped short of loathing. He was not quite sure whether this loathing was of a physical or a moral nature. He reproached himself for experiencing this sensation, which he could not resist, when he had come to visit these people in the guise of a friend and to ask Philippe to perform a friendly service for him. He reproached himself sternly and, looking at Philippe, he repeated to himself, "He's a good fellow. There's not a

trace of malice in him." He was quite sure that Philippe was a good fellow with nothing nasty about him. He was sure. And yet this uneasiness, this almost physical revulsion were real and materializing into a concrete thing.

A good fellow, certainly. But suddenly Francis remembered an episode that had taken place sometime back. It had not happened so very long ago—seven years at the most. Francis and Philippe had been about ten then. Yet it seemed to Francis that this memory belonged to a past so remote as to be wholly unreal. It had happened near Mme Delahaye's garden on a hot luminous afternoon in August. From beyond the thicket of bamboos, one could hear the thud of a tennis ball on a hard court, and sometimes two voices, those of Hélène and Gérard Delahaye, crying "Play! Ready!" Under the veranda at the far end of the garden, Mme Delahaye, M. de Balansun, M. Lardenne, and Mme Costellot were playing bridge while they waited for tea to be served. The sun was like an immense metallic flame and the tennis balls thudded in the dry, scorching, quivering air. Philippe was sitting on the grass in the ditch under the bamboos, a sling in his hand. His little profile was hard and unmoved and his eyes did not blink in the dazzling light. He could have stared straight into the sun. But he was not looking at the sun. He was watching a bird perched on the highest bamboo, a round gray bird singing with all its might. Slowly, steadily, silently, Philippe stretched out his arm and pulled the rubber band of his sling. "You're not going to kill it, Philippe!" implored Francis, who was sitting in the ditch beside him. . . . He laid his hand on Philippe's arm. And then the other boy had turned his face toward him—a brown, sunburned face with an expression of almost divine incomprehension. In those eyes that could stare straight into the sun there was a calm, inflexible determination. Then again Francis saw only his profile, turned toward the bird warbling high up, a little gray ball against the blue sky. It was like the profile of a small archer cast in bronze. "Don't shoot, Philippe!" The pebble whizzed through the air, whistling as it flew. "Got him!" said Philippe. "He's fallen on the other side." He slipped between the stems of the bamboos, and Francis followed him miserably.

Philippe ran up to Hélène, who was still holding her tennis racket in her right hand, while in her left lay the little gray ball, ruffled and covered with blood, and with a yellow beak gaping open among its feathers.

"Give it to me, m'dame," Philippe said.

Hélène, a tall young girl in a white skirt, had closed her fingers over

the gray ball and looked at the urchin with a severe expression. "Why did you kill that bird? It was a horrid thing to do."

"Give it to me, m'dame," Philippe repeated.

"Do you understand what a horrid thing you have done?"

Philippe stamped his foot furiously.

"*Merdel!* Give it to me. I want it!"

"Give it to him, Hélène," said Gérard, who had now joined them.

"You're wasting your time talking to that little guttersnipe."

Hélène had thrown the bird over the thicket, on the other side of the tennis court. Philippe slipped between the stems of the bamboos again, with the quick, agile movement of a little beast of prey.

Then Hélène kissed Francis, whose eyes were full of tears. She had told him never to play again with that horrid boy, who was not a fit playmate for him.

"And yet," thought Francis, as he sat in the Arréguy's kitchen, "I am sure there's not a trace of malice in him. He's a good sort."

When he thought his visit had lasted the approved time, not too long for him to be in their way, and long enough not to appear to have come for the sole purpose of asking a favor—he got up and took his leave. Mme Arréguy wished him good night with more cordiality than she had evinced on his arrival and shook hands with him. Philippe accompanied him to the threshold.

"I was awfully pleased to see you," he said. "You should have come to see me more often this year. You know I still can't make any sense out of Latin, your help would have been worth a lot!" he added laughing good humoredly. "You're so smart! And you're a good guy!" He nudged Francis cordially in the ribs. "And joking aside, I believe you've made a hit with Mother Arréguy."

He squeezed Francis' arm.

"Sorry I can't ask you to stay, but I'm going to the movies. So long, Francis. Don't worry. I'll deliver your message. And don't bother about the parcel. I'll come and pick it up tomorrow evening. Don't mention it; it's a pleasure. Good night."

Francis ran home through the fog.

7.

M. DE BALANSUN had really gone out as he said he would. But instead of going for a walk through the town to calm his overwrought nerves,

he went straight to a house in the next street, the house of Mme Delahaye.

Ever since this lady had settled in Saint-Clar, that is to say for about fifteen years, she had been the exquisite object of a love which the Count, with innocent self-deception, described as "an old friendship." M. de Balansun had known the composer Charles Delahaye well and his attachment to Cécile had already been ardent in those days. When Mme Delahaye became a widow and went to live at Saint-Clar, the "old friendship" underwent a change, not in its essential character, but in its degree of warmth. The visits became more and more frequent, the tone more familiar, until something like a tender matrimonial association crept into this extramatrimonial relationship. Yet both of them would have been deeply shocked if someone had mentioned the subject of adultery.

Charles Delahaye had not been appreciated in his lifetime, not even by the most advanced musical circles of the capital. The austere inspiration of his "Psalm," his two cantatas, his symphony for the organ, and his "Christian Pastorale" based on the poems of a local troubadour, and their possibly too scholarly, careful, and delicate style seemed discouraging to a public accustomed to the more exuberant, but also more accessible audacities of the great mountebanks of contemporary music. Even the greatest virtuosos described his Piano Sonata as infernally difficult to play and preferred not to tackle it. After her husband's death Mme Delahaye proceeded to air the house at Saint-Clar and to furnish it according to her taste, which was distinguished. Over the piano she hung a portrait of the composer painted by Jacques Emile-Blanche. (Charles, a kindly giant with limpid eyes, was here depicted against a Basque landscape, with a rustic church in the background.) She purchased a victrola, latest model, and fitted up a library of records. She also bought the works of Mme Blavatsky, Annie Besant, etc., and immersed herself in the literature of spiritualism. Her husband, as a devout and sincere Christian, had forbidden her once and for all to communicate with the "other side" and Mme Delahaye had obeyed, regretfully but submissively, for she loved and respected the composer. Nevertheless she secretly considered this severe prohibition as a deplorable relic of the Dark Ages—for she was at the same time a fierce agnostic and a convinced neophyte of the occult arts. When Charles had departed this life, her deep grief was mitigated by the certainty that her beloved husband was now enjoying eternal felicity, not in the ridiculous Papist heaven of swans' feathers and tinsel halos, but in that luminous realm where

spirits waited for their next incarnation; there he was in close contact with various astral personalities called Fauré, Tournemire, and Vincent d'Indy.

For anyone except Mme Delahaye, it would indeed have been difficult to imagine Charles under the subtle, fluid form of ectoplasm freed from earthly servitude. Actually, the peculiar genius of the defunct composer had consisted in a powerful synthesis of sensuality and spirituality. Pious and naïve as a medieval builder of cathedrals, he also possessed the appetite of a greedy ogre and a positively Turkish predilection for fat women. His own wife, for that matter, did not come under this category, but he loved her nonetheless and in due course had four children by her. Toward the end of his life the athletically built composer weighed more than a hundred kilos. When he sat at the organ, he reminded one of the popular conception of a jolly monk. At table he rivaled Gargantua. It might happen that two hours after working at the adagio of his symphony "*In Exitu*," a composition that ranks with the most elevated and purely spiritual achievements of modern music, he would be devouring a whole chicken or absent-mindedly fondling the rounded behind of his Basque maid. Yes, indeed, it was not easy to picture him as a "psychic communicator" in an almost entirely incarnate state. But Cécile, being an idealist, had operated this bewildering metamorphosis with the greatest of ease.

Mme Delahaye was a frail little old lady with a face like an eighteenth-century pastel, surrounded by an aureole of silver hair. In spite of her extreme myopia, a charming but uncomfortable vanity made her forego the use of spectacles, so that she was forced to read the works of Mme Blavatsky with her nose glued to the page. By its vigor, acuteness, and precision, her sense of practical reality actually rivaled that which M. de Balansun exhibited in the most trifling circumstances of everyday life. It is certain that this was the reason why these two people had been mutually attracted from the moment they first set eyes on each other; they had recognized each other as creatures of the same species. To say that they liked each other is an understatement; they simply adored each other, as men and women can when they have grown old and the gestures of love have lost their significance. At their age such attachments become innocent like the affections of children. These two were wonderfully matched; both were equally ingenuous, candid, and sweetly optimistic, but each imagined that their friendship was based on the happy equilibrium between two harmoniously contrasting characters. Cécile saw in Léon an accomplished man of the

world, chivalrous and subtle, as well as an energetic and clear-headed person who was capable of efficacious action, and was experienced, sensible, and remarkably well informed on all political, economic, and social matters. For Léon, Cécile was the most exquisite of ladies—an artist “to her finger tips,” an expert musician, and a devoted mother. With her, he had immediately adopted the role of the affectionate protector, the elder brother filled with indulgent tenderness. The only thing that he did not quite agree with was his friend’s tendency for spiritualist practices designed to invoke Fauré or Vincent d’Indy. M. de Balansun was an orthodox Catholic and looked upon all this as nonsense, possibly even dangerous to people whose mental balance was none too firm. Nevertheless, he did not have the heart to oppose his friend’s mania and merely shrugged his shoulders, making fun of her noisily, like a facetious bumblebee. “Well, little girl,” he would say, “did you have a nice talk with M. Fauré last night? (He always called her “little girl”; to him she was the old friend who remained deliciously young and fragile.) There was nothing clandestine about this friendship; on the contrary, it was displayed in the full light of day. The two families were on amicable terms; Mme de Balansun went to tea with Cécile and received her in her own house. The children saw much of each other; during the holidays, Hélène and Francis went to play tennis with Gérard, a boy of Hélène’s own age, and with his elder sisters, until they married. Mme Delahaye and the Count often met at the bridge table, either in their respective homes or in those of their mutual friends, the Lardennes and Mme Costellot. When he returned from one of his evening visits to Mme Delahaye, M. de Balansun would never have dreamed of concealing from his wife that he had just seen Cécile. What was there to hide about it? He would tell her that instead of going to the club—as he sometimes did—he had called to see how “our friend” was and to listen to a victrola record. What could have been more natural? Mme de Balansun also thought it quite natural, but nevertheless a fleeting expression of sadness would overcast her countenance. She vaguely understood that her husband had found something in Cécile that she had never been able to give him; just that amount of poetry that is necessary to justify existence. In her invariably gentle, noncommittal voice she would say, “I hope that our friend is quite well?” and then go back to her pots and pans. Thus it came about that M. de Balansun, the most inoffensive of men, who was utterly incapable of doing wrong, had succeeded in making someone suffer; it was to be

expected that his guileless soul would be called to account for it at the Last Judgment.

Before he arrived on that particular evening, Mme Delahaye was in conference with Berthe, her maid-of-all-work. The subject of their conversation was neither the menu for the next day nor the necessity of finding some good floor polish on the black market; it was nothing less than the last apparition of Satan in Berthe's room. While the mistress was privileged to communicate with the most outstanding spirits in the astral world, the maid enjoyed the nocturnal favors of the Prince of Darkness in person. This emulator of the sainted Curé d'Ars was a girl from the Landes, aged about thirty-five, strong and muscular like the little cows of her country that the *écarteurs*, wearing black berets and red sashes, bait in the arena when the local fiestas are held. One night she had been visited in a dream by a young man endowed with a pair of horns similar to those of a billy goat. It was the "deuce" as she called him. The deuce returned a few weeks later and this time Berthe was awake. She was then already in the Delahayes' service and she told her masters about her experience. Charles was deeply concerned; he took her to Lourdes and had her exorcised. Lucifer took the hint; for a time he seemed willing to forego his low *amours*. But after Charles (who had impressed the maid very much) had died, the Evil One appeared again and from then on he would visit Berthe about three times a year, like a country bumpkin who goes to have some fun at the Folies Bergères. These visits were most discreet. Mme Delahaye would have known nothing about them if the maid had not described them in detail the next morning. The old lady, being an agnostic, did not believe for a moment in the existence of the devil; but as she was a disciple of Annie Besant, she thought that poor Berthe was the victim of some primitive spirit, a specter on a low plane, a lecherous lemur like those who sometimes impose themselves at night on persons who are too weak to resist them. Berthe was being visited by an incubus, and as everybody knows, the literature of occultism positively swarms with incubi. Therefore Mme Delahaye listened to Berthe's confidences with lively scientific interest, often with a notebook in her hand—here was valuable evidence indeed, an experience *in vivo*.

On that particular evening she was setting down certain observations into a notebook in a minute scrawl. She was holding the notebook close to her nose and sitting in a large easy chair, near a lamp that cast a soft light on the carpet. Berthe, in white apron, black woolen stockings, and

rope sandals, stood before the fireplace, her large red hands placidly folded on her stomach.

"What time was it when he appeared, did you say?"

"A quarter to two, madame."

"And when did he leave?"

"At half past three."

"Did he say anything this time?"

"Yes. But I could not repeat to Madame what he said to me. No, I simply couldn't."

"All right, Berthe, all right. I am making a scientific study, not a judicial investigation, and I want to spare your feelings and your modesty. Let me see, how far did I get? Ah, yes, were you afraid, as you were the other times?"

"Yes, madame, but not as much as the other times. I must tell you, yesterday evening I had a sort of feeling he would come—"

"Remarkable, most remarkable. A telepathic premonition, a presentiment of trance. Everything is confirmed in an irrefutable manner. Tell me, Berthe, one more question: did he have any attributes?"

As the maid stared at her in bewilderment, she blushed scarlet and hastened to correct herself, "The diabolic attributes, Berthe, the horns, the cloven feet, that is what I mean."

"To be sure," said Berthe, "the horns—" She made an effort to remember. "He had horns, madame, like he always has. But not cloven feet. No, No. Why, he even tickled the soles of my feet with his big toes."

Mme Delahaye gave a little cry of delight.

"He tickled the soles of your feet? How interesting! The erotic medium Alida, who was investigated by Professor Schwartz, declared that her incubus was in the habit of producing excitation by delicately brushing the soles of her feet. All these facts corroborate each other. Your incubus is undoubtedly the same kind as the one described by Alida," she added, rapidly scribbling in her notebook.

At that moment the bell sounded—it was the imperious ring of M. Balansun.

"I'll go to open the door," said Berthe. "It's Monsieur le Comte."

Before entering the drawing room, the Count divested himself of his cape of Pyrenean homespun and handed it to the maid, together with his walking stick and his hat. As usual, he wore a cheviot coat, a starched collar, and a tie with polka dots. He reminded one of M. de Poeyminans, the friend of Mme de Grand Air in the *Aventures de*

Bécassine. Only Mme Delahaye never assumed a grand air and Berthe, whose figure and features suggested something brutal, limited, and slightly sinister, was not in the least like *Bécassine*.

"Good evening, my dear friend," the Count exclaimed as he advanced with outstretched hands. "Ah, ah, we have been engaged in taking notes, I see."

Mme Delahaye looked round to make sure that the maid was in the hall.

"Berthe was molested again last night," she whispered.

"Tut, tut, tut! Stuff and nonsense! Or at least something you should not let bother you, Cécile. It is something very nasty. Believe me, Berthe has not been molested, as you say so ingenuously, by a shade from Hades, but rather by the abnormal activity of certain endocrine glands that I refuse to name within these candid walls. M. Charcot, one of the shining lights of the Medical School, would have classified the case of your maid in less time than it takes you to listen to these ramblings—I mean Berthe's ramblings, of course, for M. Charcot's discourses are not in the least disconnected, even though the ideas of the Salpêtrière school have not escaped a certain distortion by according a too important role, or at least so it appears to me, to the supreme importance of the libido. But enough! these scabrous theories, which a man abreast of the times cannot afford to ignore, are not designed for the ears of a little girl like you. I prefer to allow you to believe that Berthe received the visits of a—how do you call it—a lemur or a specter or some other Grand Guignol character."

"Nevertheless I have been able to establish some remarkable parallels, Léon," murmured Mme Delahaye. "However, I doubt whether they would convince a skeptic like you."

Berthe had come in again and was busying herself vaguely round the drawing room.

"You can go now, my girl," commanded M. de Balansun, as he sat down in the easy chair that he invariably used. "I think we do not need you any longer."

Berthe seemed to take a different view of the matter.

"Monsieur—" she began, rocking back and forth on her heels.

"Well, what is it?"

"He's come back," she said in a low voice, as though alluding to a disturbing mystery.

The Count fidgeted. His thoughts were all with the great affair of the day, entirely filled with the blinding revelation that had over-

whelmed him, and he felt unable to endure the foolishness of this insistent idiot. He cast a withering glance at her, "The deuce has come back, has he?"

"Yes. Last night, at three o'clock."

"My poor girl," M. de Balansun burst out, with all the scathing haughtiness Gaston le Roux might have used when rating a menial, "my poor girl, why do you imagine the devil would bother with you? What pleasure could he find in spending a night with you? With *you!*" he repeated with devastating scorn.

The Count esteemed the Prince of Darkness too highly to imagine him possessor of such sordid tastes.

"The demon tracks down a very different kind of prey. Back to the pantry, my girl, and give up the idea that you are the object of an infernal pursuit!"

He turned toward Mme Delahaye.

"Just think for a moment, my dear friend. Milton's Satan, the splendid Lucifer of *Paradise Lost*, he who tempted Our Lord in the desert, now finds himself reduced to troubling Berthe's slumbers. She takes herself for Eloa. Really, nowadays the pretensions of the simple know no bounds!"

He dismissed the maid with a gesture. But Berthe was an obstinate girl. Besides, at the bottom of her heavy stupidity she possessed a modicum of peasant cunning and plain common sense. Though she had not entirely understood the Count's tirade, she was aware of its offensive intention.

"So you don't think the deuce could be bothered with a poor girl like me," she said. "You think he only bothers with the rich?"

Berthe's class consciousness had been thoroughly roused.

"To the pantry!" cried M. de Balansun, whose patience was exhausted.

At a sign from Mme Delahaye, Berthe left the room. Before she closed the door, she cast a black angry look at the old gentleman.

"My word, I believe I have vexed her!" he exclaimed.

"Berthe is very sensitive," Mme Delahaye said.

"Sensitive! Good Heavens, what will we hear next?"

M. de Balansun, who had adapted an extremely aristocratic version of Cartesian philosophy for his personal use, was of the opinion that servants and "*la canaille*" in general were nothing but simple machines endowed with certain conditioned reflexes of a purely physiological nature. Thus it often happened that by a silly automatic caste reaction he

infringed the most elementary rules of tact and hurt the feelings of humble people. This titled bumblebee, intoxicated by his own grandiloquence, went around bumping into everything without realizing that he sometimes bumped too hard. This was forgivable in him because he knew not what he did, but the world forgives a consciously inflicted hurt more easily than an unconscious one. These qualities of scornful arrogance were the least pleasing trait in the Count's character.

"My dear," he continued severely, "I am afraid that you treat this creature with exaggerated kindness. You treat her almost as though she were a relation of yours. Those people find it only too easy to consider themselves our equals. The English, who are admirable psychologists, have a proverb that I should like to see taught to our children already in the kindergarten: 'Familiarity breeds contempt.'"

"Berthe is a good girl, my friend," said Mme Delahaye, timidly defending her position.

"Nevertheless, I admit I ought to be a bit more distant with her, for it sometimes happens that she answers me in a most uncontrolled way, not to say with positive rudeness."

"What did I tell you! Little girl, you are far too kind. An angel, that is what you are. Saint Cécile, patron of musicians! You really need someone with authority in the house, someone with punch, as the vulgar say. By the way, what about your big son? Have you had any news from him recently?"

The eighteenth-century pastel face became pink with pleasure.

"I got a letter yesterday, my dear. Gérard is very well. He complains a little about the hard life in Paris, but only in fun, so as not to depress me. He is such a dear boy!"

"The best of sons, I know it," pronounced the Count decidedly. "We can only thank Heaven for having given us such good children. Is Gérard still working at his college?"

"Yes, still at Sainte-Croix, and then there are his articles in the newspapers—"

"I read a very fine essay of his the other day, if I am not mistaken on Corneille's *Suréna*, which has been most opportunely revived in our national theater."

"He writes that he is going to a concert with Hélène in the near future."

"Splendid. I am delighted, dear Cécile, absolutely delighted that our children maintain the same pure flame of friendship that unites their parents."

He laid his hand on that of Mme Delahaye, accompanying the gesture by a tender glance.

"Dear Léon," murmured the old lady.

He cleared his throat noisily, as though to dispel an unmanly emotion.

"My dear," he said in a changed tone, "you now see me caught up in a turmoil of extreme agitation."

"You have no serious worries, I hope?" she said anxiously.

"Oh, no. On the contrary. But I ought to keep silent, I ought to conceal my agitation."

Naturally he was burning to divulge its cause. It was expressly for this purpose that he had hastened to Cécile after his conversation with Francis.

"I have come to you this evening, my dear, first to ask how you are, and also to find with you, in the soft and calming atmosphere of your home, the physical and moral relaxation I need after the terrific tension of this afternoon."

"You alarm me—"

"Hush! I have sworn to remain silent. For mercy's sake, do not press me, do not ply me with questions. Allow me to re-establish my peace of mind gradually."

"Of course, you must rest. You have had an exhausting day at your office, I am sure. Rest as long as you like."

She went to throw a log on the fire. Then she sat down again, took some knitting from a work basket, and began to knit.

"Ask me no questions!" cried M. de Balansun, in a provocative tone.

"I am not asking you any, my friend."

"That is true," he admitted regretfully.

A minute or two passed in silence. M. de Balansun assumed an innocent expression while he cast sidelong glances at the old lady. He was waiting for the questions, the ardent feminine curiosity that he would happily satisfy little by little, bit by bit, with cunningly planned progression and torturing delays, but Mme Delahaye continued to knit, calmly and peacefully. Finally he could contain himself no longer. Discretion carried to this pitch was monstrous. Clutching his head in his hands, he exclaimed, "My head is bursting!"

Mme Delahaye laid her knitting needles and her knitting carefully into the work basket and seemed to be on the point of rising from her chair.

"Would you like a little Bach, my friend?" she asked obligingly, in the same tone as she might have said, "Would you like an aspirin?"

For Mme Delahaye was in the habit of counteracting various nervous ailments by listening to masterpieces of classical music. She often advised M. de Balansun to employ this remedy, and he had done so with great advantage. She had discovered by experience that a migraine could be dispelled by the Concerto in D Minor for two violins.

"Bach indeed—what next?" the lawyer exclaimed in an exasperated tone. "Oh, forgive me," he added immediately. "I am so bewildered, so upset. I have just lived through the most surprising, unforgettable hours. I have just had a revelation of—how shall I define it—the most sensational nature, if you will overlook this horrible journalistic expression. Sensational is the word. My most firmly established ideas have been swept away as by the breath of a hurricane. A revision of all values, as that Boche *par excellence*, that superlative Teuton, that sham Wotan with his papier-mâché Valhalla, in short that poor old lunatic of a Nietzsche would have said. A revision of values. Like Saint Nicodemus, I feel myself being born a second time in the spirit."

"All this seems very grave, my friend."

She gazed at him with her beautiful, shortsighted eyes, wrinkling their lids slightly in an effort to see.

"It is indeed grave," he said.

"Does it perhaps concern one of your clients?"

"She has understood nothing!" He got up and began to walk about. "The little girl has understood nothing, as was to be expected. This charming little head knows only three passions; three interests; her children, her music, and—her incubi! Without these, no hope of salvation."

"I am very sorry, Léon, but you must explain yourself a little."

"My dear friend, are you capable for once, just for once, of lending your attention to matters that are not immediately connected with the narrow domain of your everyday preoccupations?"

"I'll try, as you wish me to do so," she said humbly. And as though to demonstrate her good will, she wrinkled her eyelids a little more.

The Count, who had been standing by the fire, now advanced three steps toward her, stopped, and stared at her coldly without speaking. Then he said suddenly, like a police officer trying to disconcert a presumed murderer by an unexpected question, "What do you think of the Marshal?"

"The Marshal?"

"Yes. The man of Vichy, Pétain. The man of Montoire, the head of the French State."

"Well, my friend, the same as you think yourself, I suppose."

"That is where you are wrong!" cried M. de Balansun. "For I do not think so any longer!"

He proceeded to tell her what he now thought, and he did so with a fiery eloquence far exceeding anything Francis had succeeded in putting into his arguments. He worked himself up. Intoxicated by his own verbal debauch, he rose by degrees to the expression of a feverish hatred. One might have thought that the Marshal had outraged him personally, for instance, by taking liberties with Mme de Balansun. In a word, when the Count came to the end of his diatribe, there was nothing left except for him to write the "*Iambes*" or the "*Châtiments*."

"My dear," Mme Delahaye protested in a feeble voice. "You surprise me— M. Pétain— Do you really think so. M. Pétain—"

"I do not only think so, I am sure!"

He calmed down and resumed his seat. More moderately, he adduced one by one the other reasons why one must "reconsider these matters in a new light," "change one's side," and "join the camp of the free against tyranny." In moving words, he recapitulated the tale of Albion's (no longer "perfidie Albion's") heroic resistance since June, 1940. As to the Russians—

"By the way, dear Cécile," he asked with affectionate irony, like a man who seeks to catch an innocent person in a harmless trap, "what do you think of M. Stalin?"

Mme Delahaye now lost her bearings entirely. She made a superhuman effort to grasp one solid fragment of this world that seemed to be returning to its original state of chaos.

"Stalin— The Tartar who reigns at the Kremlin surrounded by his Jewish acolytes," she murmured, repeating word for word an old slogan of M. de Balansun's.

The latter gave vent to a pitying laugh.

"Another victim of Boche propaganda!" he exclaimed. "My poor Cécile, you are altogether mistaken. Stalin has a first-class brain, he is one of the most intelligent leaders of the present time. I have been watching M. Stalin for years. For years I have closely followed his domestic and foreign policy. And if you have any faith in my opinion on these matters, then let me tell you that M. Stalin is an extremely able diplomat. Imagine calling a man of his stamp a Tartar! No, no, it is true that this Boche propaganda will stop at nothing!"

He was burning to speak of Francis as well, but his conscience awoke with a start and he had enough will power to stop himself in time. He only said, "This afternoon I have been talking to a patriot. A young patriot, a genuine patriot. He is the one who showed me the light and aroused my spirit."

Now it was Mme Delahaye's turn to clasp her hands round her head as though it were in danger of bursting.

"My dear Léon," she murmured plaintively, "I am certainly very happy for your sake for what you have experienced. But as for myself, my poor little head, as you call it, will not take it in; all I can show for it, I fear, is an awful migraine. Do you know that you have been talking for a whole hour? Oh, merciful Heaven, a little Bach!"

She rubbed her temples with the tips of her fingers. "My dear, I have the very deepest affection for you, but at times, I must confess you are as exhausting as a cataclysm."

M. de Balansun was literally dumfounded. Cécile had not accustomed him to so merciless a degree of frankness. He was about to excuse himself when Berthe's entrance exempted him from the obligation.

"Madame is served," said Berthe.

"I'm going, I'm going," said the Count. "It is late and they are surely waiting for me at home."

Berthe accompanied him into the hall in order to hand him his stick, his hat, and his cape. Mme Delahaye rose to her feet.

"You must come back and explain all these matters to me, Léon," she said. "When your mind is rested, quite calmly. Will you do that?"

"Certainly, my dear, you can count on it."

He was putting on his cape when he suddenly became motionless as though he had been turned into stone. On the wall opposite to him, a pink and beaming Pétain was staring at him with his fine sky-blue eyes out of a blue, white, and red frame.

"Cécile," said M. de Balansun in an expressionless voice, "I am unable to tolerate for even a minute the presence in this house of this effigy, whose meaning we have not understood."

He tore down the portrait. Holding it between his thumb and index finger, as though it were a piece of soiled paper, he handed it to Berthe.

"My girl, you can throw that into the dustbin."

Berthe stared at him with stupefaction.

"Into the dustbin, my girl."

"Perhaps you are going too far, my friend," Mme Delahaye ventured to remark.

"I'm not going to throw him into the dustbin," Berthe declared. "I don't know why you've taken him down, but I'm going to stick him up in my room."

"That's a good idea!" cried M. de Balansun sardonically. "Stick him up in your room. We can be sure that he will get on extremely well with the 'deuce'."

He opened the door and walked away with a rapid, decided step, his cape billowing out behind him, his hat at a pugnacious angle, like an old goblin. The tapping of his heels on the paving stones rang out long after he had already disappeared in the night and the fog.

8.

Now it was late. Soon the curfew would sound. The mist had dispelled itself a little above the town, floating like an exhalation from the ground and wrapping itself round the houses, softening their sharp angles. The river Gave, which had sparkled so coldly during the afternoon, was now invisible, although its murmuring could be heard as well as the muffled roar of the cascades at the electric works. One by one, the narrow, livid streaks of light from the windows were darkened. The three robots continued to pace through the paved streets, first one boot, then the other—three phantom robots, lit up every hundred yards by the blue cone of light from a street lamp.

In the center of the town a crowd was flowing out of the only movie house and dispersing hurriedly, for the curfew was imminent. They had seen a film with Marika Rokk, the splendors of Vienna, rustling dresses, an orchestra playing the music of Strauss. It had been preceded by the news—bang, bang, bang, bang—with the **V** on the screen growing larger with every note, while against a background of smoke and flashes, German soldiers with fixed bayonets stormed a Russian fort. They had seen Russian prisoners. Mme Costellot was still shuddering; unshaven bandits, what it must be when they are let loose over a city with orders to loot and rape! With orders to rape for all they are worth. Well, one knows what that means. The chief of the *Kommandatur* had been in the movie, monocled, elegant—a baron. And next to him in his box, the manageress of Coryse Salomé, a walking advertisement for beauty culture. Say what you like, she goes too far, that woman! Let him come to her house at night, if she likes, it's no concern of mine; what people do when they are alone is nobody's business, but to make a

display of it at the cinema, under the nose of three hundred inhabitants of Saint-Clar—no, really, there are limits. One must know how to behave. This is what one calls public provocation. Damn it all, people are excited enough as it is, there is no need to provoke them. I, for instance, received von Brackner to tea at the Lardennes, but I would never dream of going to the movies with him, in his box. Besides, Jacques would not have it—and for once I think he would be right.

Mme Costellot snuggled her chin into her fur collar and walked faster. She passed the Ituralde girl, who was walking with a tall boy who had his arm round her waist. Ah! it's young Arréguy, that little devil. I wonder how a young girl dare to go out with that ruffian. If one can call her a young girl, that is to say. Nothing could be more doubtful in the case of Janine Ituralde. But where is he taking her to? Toward the War Memorial—that's bad. The War Memorial at Saint-Clar consisted of a broken basalt column surrounded by a hedge of spindle trees. This monument to the dead sheltered the loves of the living on festive evenings, especially on the Fourteenth of July. If a dance had been held on the evening of Armistice Day, one or two illegitimate children would certainly have been conceived at the foot of the column. However, there never was a dance. Instead there was a ceremony with two minutes' silence, Chopin's "Funeral March" played by the municipal band, and a speech by the mayor. Maybe the ghosts of the dead even preferred to watch the frolics of youth in the shadow of their monument. One wonders whether the dead can appreciate the rhetoric of the mayor of Saint-Clar, or whether they are really impressed by the officially imposed minutes of silence that have never drowned the insensate clash of the world's cymbals. Do these outer marks of respect mean anything, there where they are now? Probably they find more satisfaction in seeing a handsome country lass fall on the greensward like a ripe fruit.

But that evening Janine Ituralde was in a captious mood. She said it was cold. "I'll make you warm," said Philippe with a little laugh. "But the curfew—there isn't time," said Janine. He insisted and insisted. His voice was menacing, deep and pathetic. He said they needn't bother lying down. Ten minutes later, he kissed Janine on the cheek quite lightly, as he might have kissed a sister. Now it was his turn to be in a hurry to leave. He talked of the curfew; grave as a judge, he said it was late. He was walking so fast that she had difficulty in keeping up with him. "See you tomorrow," he said and left her, just like that, at the street corner, striding away with long steps.

A little later he was home. He tiptoed upstairs as softly as he could, so as not to awaken anybody—a superfluous precaution, for in the dense darkness of the bedroom Mme Arréguy was stretching out her neck like a listening animal. Each almost imperceptible creak of the boards sounded inside her breast, magnified a hundred times over. It sounded inside her breast. The day after tomorrow, she thought—he is leaving the day after tomorrow. And he would not even stay at home tonight. The day after tomorrow— Oh, why is life so sad, so sad? The day after tomorrow— And I'll be living alone with that old jackass snoring beside me, the gutless old fool who never says a word. He says it's me that took the guts out of him. As though anyone were needed for that! What a life—making soup day after day for the bald-headed bum who comes home, sits down, doesn't open his mouth, and looks at me like an ox. He says it's me that took the guts out of him. The day after tomorrow. What have I done to deserve such a life? If at least we'd stayed in Paris. But he wanted to come to this place, because he owned this damned hovel. My family home, as he calls it. He said the climate of Saint-Clar would do Philippe good. No fear, Philippe was as strong as a little bull when he was nine years old. The day after tomorrow— What have I done? When I was young, I had some swell girl friends—how we used to laugh! Those nights at Freddy's Bar. Always in demand la Fernande was—what a success I was. When the old buzzard wanted to marry me, I thought I was going to have a fine life. So what? Traveling salesman for Singer Sewing Machines. So what? Cooking meals day after day, washing up, and polishing floors, and don't spare the elbow grease! Lucky I had Philippe. The day after tomorrow. And he wouldn't stay with me this evening! Lucky I had Philippe, or I would have dumped the old man—and how! And I'd have gone back to Paris. So perhaps it's too bad that I had Philippe. What would I have rather? Oh! I'd rather have Philippe every time—now that I'm an old hag. But why must life be so disgusting? Some days I cry and cry, I don't know why, I just can't stop myself. Some days I feel I'd like to go to church. Only I can't stand priests. Can't you just see Mother Arréguy going to confession every so often? We know what they'd say in Saint-Clar: those retired whores always go in for religion. That's what they'd say in Saint-Clar. No, nothing doing, that's not up my alley. The boss at Freddy's Bar used to say 'la Fernande has no faith and no morals.' And why should I have any morals? To please that imbecile husband of mine? For the rabble of Saint-Clar? For the good Lord? Who's been so good to me? Did you say He's been good to me, the good Lord? Let

them all go to hell! I've got Philippe. The day after tomorrow. The little bastard, he couldn't even stay at home tonight. A clean shirt indeed. But how handsome he is! Why do I feel like crying so often? I'm sleepy—I'm so sleepy—Philippe asleep, Philippe. How handsome—Philippe—How handsome—Phil—Sleepy—slee—”

Her hand lay on the sheet, her beautiful hand that was like an Italian Madonna's.

Mme Delahaye's hand also lay on the sheet, but it was moving spasmodically. It was a fine delicate hand, a pianist's hand, and now it tensed up and tapped and played a nervous, agitated run on the sheet. Mme Delahaye was having bad dreams. She dreamed that M. de Balansun was engaged in a dispute with Tournemire because of the nightly visits of a succubus to Marshal Pétain. Tournemire declared with great violence that the succubus should look after his armored division in North Africa instead of tormenting the Marshal. M. de Balansun told him with equal impetuosity that the succubus was actually the secret agent of the O.G.P.U. and that one must play the game of M. Stalin. In the end the Count seized a Frankish battle-ax and began to beat the former organist of Sainte-Clothilde, whose ectoplasm shrieked horribly. At this phase of her nightmare, Mme Delahaye awoke with a start.

M. de Balansun had not yet gone to bed. It had required a tremendous effort to behave as usual during dinner. Whenever his wife left the room for a moment he would exchange a significant glance with Francis. Now, wrapped in a warm greatcoat, the Count was sitting in the drawing room, which was more icy than ever, framing a letter to the head of the College. A typewritten letter, you may be sure, and also an extremely typical Balansun letter. M. le Supérieur is kindly requested to excuse Francis, and not to be surprised if Francis at some future date should be absent again, owing to certain reasons of a private nature that the Count regrets he is unable to divulge. And that was that. He signed with a flourish and sealed with the Balansun arms. The matter had been dealt with. Thereupon the Count, who was still far too excited to go to bed, added a page to his biography of Gaston le Roux. He had just reached the chapter dealing with the war of attrition that the Baron of Saint-Clar waged on his neighbor, the Seigneur de Maslacq. M. de Balansun's cleverly medieval style now became embellished by a few contemporaneous expressions that would give the story a pungent flavor of reality. It is a question of dissidence and clandestine strife; a partisan joins the

free forces, discreetly camouflaged as a halberdier, concealing his harquebus or portable gun in a bag of oats. M. de Balansun thought that if he could publish his romantic biography of Gaston le Roux in the *Patriote des Pyrénées*, his allusions would point the way to his readers. What marvelous propaganda it would be—and under the very noses of the Teutons, whose proverbial heaviness would cause them to be completely hoodwinked by this pamphlet, innocently disguised as a historical novel!

Francis was asleep. Before dropping off, he had thought of the Mohican who at that moment was probably snoring away in an hotel room at Pau. He had also thought of Lavoncourt and of Hélène. He was happy. Even though it worried him a little that he had had to take papa into his confidence, he was happy. He slept, and his regular breathing lifted the sheet. His hand was laid under his head. He was not unlike an angel on an Italian painting of the *quattrocento*, although his hand was not like that of an angel or a Madonna. It was red and covered with calluses, the hand of a healthy schoolboy, a pelota player.

The silent town was wrapped in mist. Even the crackling voices of the radio had ceased. Saint-Clar was waiting for night to end. All the blue rays of light had gone out. Total darkness, silence, an inhuman night of silence and mist. Only the three robots continued their slow rounds, first one boot, then the other. They were doing their rounds. Nobody knew what they were waiting for—maybe they, too, waited for the first gleam of dawn.

Two Days Later

He was dressing with the utmost care. He drenched his hair in lavender water, the only scent Hélène would tolerate in a man, brushed his teeth vigorously—they were slightly stained by nicotine—and, after inspecting his three suits, selected the gray striped one, which seemed most suitable for an afternoon concert. The choice of a tie was not easy; it was not the right time of the year for the light-blue one; the striped blue one, which was a little more discreet, was rather too crumpled; the yellow, a horror with white polka dots—a present from a former girl friend—was decidedly out of the question; the red one would have looked nice with the gray suit, but it was too reminiscent of the bullfight at Bayonne. He decided on the navy-blue one, which was two years old

and shiny at the place where the knot came, but it couldn't be helped, with the present price of ties— Good Lord, when I think that there are plenty of crooks working on the black market, who have their suits made by expensive tailors and get themselves up like young English lords. Filthy times to live in. While all I've got is my four thousand francs a month at the college of Sainte Croix and, now and again an article in *La Gerbe*—when they don't refuse it, on some excuse that it might be interpreted in a controversial manner. It's enough to make you want to give up the whole thing. Why not go in for speculating and trading, as most of them do? After all, you don't have to be so terribly smart, all you need is an honest lack of scruples and a little nerve. But that's where the picture's wrong. Monsieur has scruples, and as for nerve—we'll come back to that. I don't even believe I'm smart enough. In short, what the hell am I doing in this world? I'm neither a terrorist nor an active collaborator nor a crook nor a hero of the resistance—so what am I doing here? Assistant lecturer at the College of Sainte-Croix and dramatic critic of *La Gerbe*. In a word, nothing. I have no genius whatever, no matter how you look at it. A poor dope. Neither handsome nor ugly, neither intelligent nor stupid, neither good nor bad. In other words, a creature mass-produced—one of millions. And yet, I'm damn conscious of my own personality! Fiercely affirming the importance of my own ego! He has not the slightest intention of being thrown in for good measure, our little Gérard—no vocation whatever for anonymity. Our little Gérard has an exaggeratedly Christian idea of his absolute value: a soul to be saved, especially known to God and loved by Him. "It is for me, it is for thee, that Jesus died upon the tree," as we used to sing in nursery school. That's enough, let's not get cynical. It's silly to play at being a freethinker. Funny—whenever I'm alone, and especially before the mirror when I'm busy knotting a faded tie or putting on a pair of not quite clean socks, I indulge in cynicism, "an introspection of merciless lucidity," as the literary manuals say. With a tortured smile, the sardonic hero of a novel written about 1925. But when I'm in the street or with other people, I'm a harmless little lamb, baa, baa, baa. I bleat to M. le Supérieur of the College. Yes, sir, certainly, the composition of the first term will take place this week, quite so, baa, baa, baa. A lamb with the editors of *La Gerbe*: Certainly, of course, I can suppress this passage or modify it according to your suggestions, baa, baa, baa. A lamb with Hélène. The lamblike *cavaliere servente*, the lamblike gentle page—because I've never been able to get her out of my system, because, as long as I can remember, she has given

me a wound which will not heal. Because her very existence is my wound and I would have to destroy her to be healed. Because even the force of habit does not dull the pain she gives me, and even possession would not release me, and even the fact that she is aging—for she is aging as I am. She already had a wrinkle across her brow, an almost imperceptible one. But I have noticed it and I must tell her about it and advise her to have a facial massage—even the fact that she is getting old is no liberation. I know that I will never have her. I know that she looks on me with affectionate contempt. She is hard, she does not try to spare me. I mean nothing to her. I could disappear out of her life and she would not even notice—and in spite of it all, year after year, for ten years now, I continue to be her *cavaliere servente*, her gentle page, her humble lamb. When she is far away, I sometimes think that I have been saved. But when she is near, I am the hopeless lover, baa, baa, baa, the sacrificed and faithful adorer. I am Friendship, Devotion, the Good Gérard, and what is more, happy to be the Good Gérard. Happy as can be, quivering with joy. And if she shows me a little kindness, a warm look or a pressure of the hand, then I am in ecstasy, I stammer, my eyes fill with tears. Silly fool! In short, I seem the predestined recipient of a kick in the pants. I should be herded into a cattle truck and deported with the nameless crowd. Because if my cynicism were anything more than a little literary affectation in front of the looking glass, if it really were the essential substance of my thoughts and my sentiments, the spiritual climate of my behavior and my actions, I would be saved. But my cynicism is only a literary affectation, separated from the rest of me by a watertight compartment. It's as simple as that—a watertight compartment. A complete divorce between the thoughts I think in secret and my outer life. Which goes to show the sophism of the classic slogan about knowing oneself. Self-knowledge as a purgative virtue or a modus of action—what bunkum. If self-knowledge alone could heal or transform, I would have been healed or transformed long ago. And if my little cynicism were anything more than a solitary vice, I would have broken away from my miserable paper long ago and have become a prince of black marketeers or someone important in *La France nouvelle* or a hero in the resistance—in a word someone who gambles with life instead of submitting to it.

. . . Why can't I get over this mania for dressing so carefully when I go to meet Hélène! As though it made the slightest difference to her whether I look smart or sloppy. But I've got to be all spruced up—that's regulations. And I'm always hoping she'll notice some detail or other,

but she's never noticed anything. I try to be like a fashionable young man with a discreet suggestion of the playboy. The idea of presuming to look like a playboy with my kind of face! It's pure infantilism, and what's more, I'm twenty-seven, I'll soon be twenty-eight. But, Good Lord! she'll soon be twenty-seven—that's serious for a woman. And a virgin at that. Sometimes there is a certain awkwardness about her, the stiffness of an adolescent. She hasn't blossomed out. But that is how I love her—my amazon, my severe, puritanical amazon! I love her because she is beautiful—and also because she is inflexible and pure, without alloy like a precious metal. Well, now you're completely crazy, my boy. This is no longer infantilism but senile decay. And it's six o'clock, I must be going, it would not do to keep her waiting. One last look in the mirror. Yes, it's all right. I can go.

"Good evening, Gérard. I hope I have not kept you waiting?" She pressed his hand with a little more warmth than usual. She was beautiful, tall and slender in a dark-blue coat of simple cut. Her ash-blonde hair was brushed back and gathered in a heavy mass in the nape of her neck, where it was held by a large-meshed net. Her face was free of make-up, as though she had just emerged from the bath. Her light eyes sparkled with inner laughter. She was radiant. She was beautiful. I won't mention facial massage, he thought. She is pleased to see me again. How sweet she is.

"You look radiant tonight—"

"Oh! I am so happy, if you only knew. For two days I have been happy. And with good reason, you must admit!"

They were walking with long strides, going up the avenue Montaigne. Night was near, the air was cold and misty. He took her arm in a comradely manner.

"And what extraordinary thing has happened to you?"

"But, my dear, where have you been? I nearly telephoned you the other evening when I heard the news. I was crazy with joy."

"Oh, you got news—"

"The Allied landing, of course!"

"That was the last thing I would have thought about. But still I cannot see any connection—"

"You're an idiot, my little Gérard." She burst out laughing and pressed the young man's arm affectionately. "I don't think I know anybody as out of touch with reality as you. You're always in the moon. You simply live outside your time. They have landed in North Africa. Do you understand what that means? It means that the war will be

ended in six months. It means that we shall spend Christmas, 1943, at peace. It means that I will see Jean again next year!"

So the radiant face was not for me, he thought. It never will be. Her happiness always come to her from others—never from me.

"I understand," he said, "I understand." He swallowed his saliva with an audible sound, his Adam's apple rising along his throat. He knew how ridiculous it looked. His Adam's apple was one of his small intimate crosses. "Darling, I don't want to disappoint you, but you know, I have my doubts about the speed of the operations in Africa—even about their effectiveness."

"Oh, no, you just can't be a bird of ill omen this time. It would be lovely if one had to count on you to keep up people's morale! But I do not believe you for a moment. Besides, it's very simple, you don't understand the first thing about it. You're very sweet, but as a political observer you're a complete washout."

She laughed again, and the pressure of her hand on the young man's arm tightened, as though she wanted to indicate that she was only joking and liked him in spite of everything.

"Think of last year, Hélène, when the U.S.S.R. came into the war. Then, too, you were convinced that everything would be over in six months' time. It doesn't look as though that were going to be the case in Russia, does it?"

"Oh, don't be a Jeremiah! I don't give a darn about Russia now. The main thing is that the Americans have landed. You will now witness the utter rout of the Germans. In fact I would not be surprised if a revolution were to break out in Berlin: the people will riot—"

"And Hitler will have an apoplectic fit. My dear girl, this is childish. Germany will harden, that's all, and counterattack. There will be no revolution inside the Reich. But in France life will become even more difficult. That will be the most immediate result of the landing in Africa. Actually it has already begun, as they are now occupying the entire territory."

She drew her arm away brusquely.

"You say that in a triumphant tone. Really, you sound as if you were pleased at the German reaction, that you delight in each new turn of the screw. My dear boy, you certainly are a collaborator in spirit, even though you are not one in actual fact. At every kick the French get you are thrilled. Montoire—you wriggle with pleasure. Laval in power—you exult. The Free Zone is occupied—you are in the seventh heaven. There is a kind of sinister masochism at the bottom of your reactions.

All the people who think as you do, the so-called 'reasonable collaborators,' all of you are masochists. One might suppose that every new humiliation of France, every new material or moral defeat, delights you, because in the general catastrophe your own personal defeat is drowned and disappears."

She was speaking with muffled violence and her beautiful smooth face had become almost ugly with anger. He stared at her, filled with horror. Suddenly she pulled herself up with a visible effort, took the young man's arm again, and smiled at him.

"I am going too far. Forgive me. I did not want to say these things and, above all, I don't want to quarrel with you today—today less than ever. But you manage to say exactly the things that make me mad. I'm awfully fond of you in spite of it all, you know that, don't you? You know I have never been able to stomach your resignation, or accept that pseudo-rationalism that allows you to accept every affront—Munich, June, 1940, Laval, the Gestapo, Vichy, the invasion of the Free Zone. You know it as well as I do. So let us avoid the subject. Mind you, I forgive you, because I know that in you there is not a shadow of calculation or self-interest or duplicity. Your attitude toward the events is absolutely disinterested. And it doesn't come from pure stupidity or obstinacy either. No. It is a—*a vice of your spirit*, or perhaps a certain flaw in your character, I really wouldn't know, but it certainly is neither stupidity nor calculation. Because once this initial vice, this spiritual deviation is accepted, you are perfectly logical and coherent. Oh, Gérard, you will be converted someday, won't you?"

While she walked on beside him, she leaned her head against his shoulder caressingly. She looked up at him with a friendly smile. It was obvious that she felt sorry for having spoken so harshly and insultingly. He took her hand in his and pressed it hard to show that he was not angry, that he forgave her.

"I pray your hopes may come true, Hélène. I cannot share your optimism, but I sincerely hope that you are right."

"It would be so much better, so much pleasanter, if we had the same hopes."

"But you wouldn't love me more," he said in a jesting tone.

But she was aware of what was concealed under the jest and gave him a quick, light kiss on the cheek.

"Let's not talk about that."

They were silent. He suddenly felt happy, with a light, melancholy, fragile happiness. This sisterly affection was all he could ever hope for

from Hélène, something fragile and sensitive like convalescence after a long sickness.

They arrived at the theater. The denizens of the best residential districts filled the foyer—Passy, la plaine Monceau, Unter den Linden. The concert was dedicated to Bach and directed by a famous conductor from Leipzig. Lights, mink coats, gold braid, men kissing ladies' hands. Bach and an artistic communion above all frontiers—in a word, the New Europe.

At the door, a boy was selling the latest edition of the evening papers. He shouted, "The fleet scuttled at Toulon!" in the same tone, as he would have shouted: "Ice cream, chocolates, lemonade."

Hélène bought a paper. She was beside herself with excitement. She turned to Gérard with shining eyes, "It's magnificent," she murmured, "it's glorious."

She immersed herself in the newspaper report. Gérard read it over her shoulder.

"The fleet has been scuttled," murmured Hélène, seized by an overwhelming emotion. Her eyes filled with tears. "Oh, Gérard, it is tremendous. They have saved the honor of France. The French sailors have saved our honor."

He stared at her with a severe and haughty expression. She was at it again! How dreadfully girl scout she could be at times! Saved the honor of France! A scout leader addressing her cubs—yet somehow a bitch. An unconscious bitch. She was overjoyed because some poor devils of French sailors had let themselves go down to the bottom of the Mediterranean and she imagined this would hasten the end of the war and bring back her Lavoncourt, her strong man of the R.A.F., her invincible scoutmaster. She's a bitch, he told himself bitterly. She would sacrifice all the sailors of France, the whole of France's youth, without batting an eyelid, if that could hasten the return of her glorious scoutmaster by twenty-four hours. And all that under the cloak of saving the honor of France. It was like 1940. She would not have minded if every French sailor, with the exception of her Jean, of course, had been blown up sky-high in order to keep her damned sentimental chauvinism intact. Spiritually, she disgusts me, he thought.

"The news leaves you cold," she remarked.

"Yes," he said decidedly. "If you want to know, it leaves me cold. But as it pleases you, I am pleased too. My devotion knows no limits."

Catching hold of her arm, he propelled her into the concert hall. She wiped her eyes; she was profoundly upset.

"My poor Gérard, I am sorry for you. Imagine not being touched by this heroic act. I am convinced that the Germans themselves are full of admiration for our sailors. You can't deny that they have a feeling for greatness. Most of them are brutes or imbeciles, but they are soldiers and they can recognize true greatness when they see it."

She's bringing that up again, he thought wearily. And that awful style! He felt the corners of his mouth drooping with distaste.

"Our sailors," he said. "The greatness of our navy recognized and saluted by our enemies— Signed Henri Bordeaux. And the assurance with which you state that most Germans are brutes or imbeciles. And you are also quite convinced that they will salute the scuttling of the fleet in a fitting manner. Have you just been reading *Les Roquevillard* or something of that kind?"

Slowly she turned her head toward him; her expression was hard and sarcastic.

"No," she said, "I have read an article in *La Gerbe* on Corneille's *Suréna*. As uplifting literature, it's much better than *Les Roquevillard*."

He felt himself blushing to the ears. I ought to get up and go now, he thought. I ought to get up and leave her—and never see her again. She never misses her aim. She has a sure hand when it comes to hurting me. Why did I write that article? It's true that it's god-awful. It is a wild eulogy on heroism and it stinks of cowardice and platitudes. I regretted having done it the moment I delivered it to the newspaper office. But why does she hound me as she does? Why doesn't she ever overlook anything? I ought to go away and never see her again. Now the things she has said to me will go on festering for days. During those days my whole being will be a festering wound.

However, being with Hélène de Balansun was rather like taking a series of alternating hot and cold showers. Once again, she relaxed, smiled, and laid her hand on the young man's arm.

"My dear boy, your article is excellent. Awfully well written. All I hold against it is that it has been published, that's all. Published at this particular time and in a sheet like *La Gerbe*. I hold against it that it is part of the universal plot of pulling the wool over our eyes. Bringing up Corneille to make us swallow June, 1940, and the Germans. Yes, you know I just can't forgive you your unconscious collaboration. But if your article had been published before 1939, I would have thought it marvelous. Don't look so unhappy, Gérard."

He returned the pressure of her hand. He had always returned the pressure of her hand, always.

"I am not unhappy. Or at least, not because of what you have said." (What a good liar I am. The wound is festering and I swear by all the gods that it doesn't hurt me.) "But I am a little sad because we have been together for exactly twenty minutes and we have not stopped bickering. And yet we have not seen each other for three weeks."

"Sorry, old boy," she said, in English. (She would insist on speaking English in public and sometimes in an exaggeratedly loud voice, especially when there were Germans about; this schoolboy trick of provoking them jarred on Gérard's nerves.) "I am sorry. I didn't mean to hurt you." Then, lapsing back into French, "If only we had the same ideas on politics, we would understand each other perfectly. But we can't help rubbing each other the wrong way, between your ideas and mine. And as I take these things so very much to heart."

"Exactly, darling," he said gently. "You have not got 'ideas,' only emotional reactions. As it happens, the man you love has gone to England in order to join the Free French forces. That explains your passionate disagreement. But if the man you loved were attached to the entourage of Pétain, your 'ideas' would be quite different."

"That is just where you are making a slight psychological mistake, my dear. You are putting the cart before the horse, somehow. If Jean had joined the Vichy party, he would not have been Jean, he would not have been the man whose personality could please and fascinate me. He would have been somebody else and I would not have loved that other person. I loved him because he was Jean. And being himself and not another, he could not help doing what he did, which was to escape to England. It was inherent in his personality, don't you see? I know I am expressing myself very badly, but you are clever enough to grasp what I am trying to say."

He smiled maliciously and did not answer. He was remembering Jean de Lavoncourt. Oh, an excellent fellow, certainly. A splendid fellow, loyal and honest. I like him, anyway. I find him quite *sympathique*. But when it comes to his personality! A typical product of Saint Cyr, a dull little soldier with all the prejudices, taboos, and conventions of his caste. One of those whose mental void is overlaid with an appearance of energy and virility great enough to make people say of them that they have "personality." A nonentity, mechanized by his education and his profession. In a word, zero. But when such a cipher possesses an energetic jaw, several deep-rooted prejudices that nothing can shake, and a masculine appearance, everybody says that he has "personality." Generous, of course, and quite capable of letting himself

be cut to ribbons, wearing a plumed shako and white gloves, in the great tradition. Lots of good qualities as well, serious minded, faithful, courteous, and fundamentally simple and unselfconscious. No passions, no complexes. Received an award for good behavior every week at school, became a wolf cub at the age of twelve, a scoutmaster at sixteen. Graduated creditably at seventeen, entered Saint Cyr at nineteen. Everywhere and at all times full of team spirit, camaraderie, zest. At the barracks, his pack was impeccable, his rifle perfectly cleaned. Inspections showed everything in perfect order inwardly and outwardly: the prescribed number of pairs of socks and just the right number of prescribed sentiments. His bedside books *Henri de Bournazel* and *Father Charles de Foucauld*. Served at Mass every Sunday—offering the touching spectacle of the clean young soldier with close-cropped hair and clear honest eyes serving Mass for the Army Chaplain. Politically a rabid nationalist. Definitely not to my taste; it makes me feel sick. And yet that is what she loves, that descendant of the Rocquevillards, that epitome of Victorianism—and not only of Victorianism: that would not matter so much, but of the ignorance of a smug bourgeoisie whose orthodoxy is quite sinister. That's what she loves, and in that manikin, the last of an old French family, she sees a unique personality. And yet she is not a half-wit. Spiritually, of course, she too is a scoutmistress, and a titled one at that. She has chosen someone of her own caste and of her own race, a clean "martial" Frenchman, with a military tradition and a Saint Cyr tie. She is impatient to go to bed with her scoutmaster. With a jaw like that, he can't but give her fine children. And what she is looking for fundamentally is a solid guarantee, a good biological insurance—children, a home, a strong arm to defend her. Her love is no more than biological interest. And in order to save her biological interests, she would gladly sacrifice all "the boys from home"—in the name of national honor, of course. She would applaud all the scuttlings—well done, little sailors, how well you have scuttled yourselves!

Rancor and distaste pulled down the corners of his mouth. H  l  ne looked at him gravely, in silence. He was suffering. He was suffering because of her.

"G  rard," she whispered, "I really believe I am being unbearable this evening, unbelievably mean and tactless. Will you forgive me?"

She spoke very gently. Her face was so clear and tender as she leaned toward him that he felt his heart melt immediately. She was beautiful, her cheeks were smooth, her forehead pure, her breast was clearly defined below the three-cornered opening of her dress. She bent her head

and he saw how young the nape of her neck was, where the heavy mass of her fair hair lay imprisoned in the net. Suddenly he felt that he wanted to bite that neck, just below the ear, just on that white, soft spot between the ear and the net. He met the young girl's eyes. He smiled. She was beautiful. She was his never-healing wound.

"I have nothing to forgive you, you know it," he said.

They both turned their heads toward the stage, where the conductor was just appearing. There was a smattering of applause. An impecunious student, leaning over the railing of the top gallery, could see below him the immense flower bed of well-dressed women, rich men, stiff, distinguished-looking officers; and when he raised his head, he could admire the murals of Maurice Denis, representing Art, Music, Orpheus, and Lyricism. Down there on the stage a little white-haired man in a dress suit was bowing to the public, turning his back to the standing musicians. Bach, plaine Monceau, Unter den Linden, minks and monacles— Art has no frontiers. The student was seized by a happy exaltation. Silence fell. The white-haired little man had turned toward the musicians. He raised his little finger, and thirty bows hung poised and motionless above the strings. Thirty parallel bows. The silence was heavy with expectation, quivering with a delightful anxiety. The penniless student knew the Concerto in E Major by heart; he was waiting for the burst of that first bar, which would sweep him away from the world of realities. He closed his eyes.

Hélène closed her eyes. She was waiting for the burst of the first bar. She also knew the Concerto by heart. She was waiting for the renewal of an ineffable and incommunicable rapture. Very gently, she withdrew her hand, which Gérard was holding, and laid it on her knees. It would not do for Gérard to hold her hand, above all not now, not when listening to the Concerto in E Major. He had no right. Only one person had that right. Someone had held her hand, long ago, on a night in August, in the drawing room at Saint-Clar. The lights were out, the open window framed a dense mass of stars in the warm night. They were sitting side by side on the divan, very chastely, like a betrothed couple of long ago. The little illuminated dial of the radio was the only point of light in the room. He had taken her hand in his big man's hand, sensitive and firm. They could almost hear each other's hearts beating. Then the allegro had burst out, as it was bursting out now. She closed her eyes. She could feel the firm, warm contact of Jean's hand closing round her own. Motionless, they had submerged themselves like one being into the light and inexpressible rapture of the allegro. They had listened to

that song of hope, which now seemed to her to be vibrating in every fiber of her body, sounding inside her breast—a pure rhythmic joy that was complete in itself. Everything had ceased to exist—the theater, the orchestra, and above all, Gérard. There was nothing left except the almost unbearable rapture of the sovereign rhythm, of perfect strength and wisdom, that song of celestial hope, which was nothing else but Jean and Hélène, a single body, a single being, suspended in the void and the night by the contact of their warm hands. She closed her eyes. In the shadow she could almost see the contours of a profile, the reflection of a grave and tender glance. Already the rapture was straining toward its own resolution in the unsurpassable perfection of the final chord. Then it attained its consummation in the perfection of the number. Hélène could open her eyes again and draw a breath. This was a parenthesis, a pause, a brief irruption to the surface of time where one could draw breath. She turned a transfigured face toward Gérard. He smiled. She returned his smile, conscious of the betrayal. But he believed that they were together in a joyful communion. He was unaware that he had ceased to exist, that he had been eliminated forever. He did not know that he had been utterly destroyed. He believed that they had found each other again in the communion of a perfect joy. His eyes were shining with the light of affection, of complete abnegation, of eternal forgiveness. She closed her eyes again and relaxed in her seat, her head tilted back, her lips a little parted, her bare throat swelling slightly. He gazed at her. She seemed like a victim offering herself up for the sacrifice. Over there, on the stage, the bows were once again poised motionless over the strings, and suddenly the world of sense faded away once more. Across the nocturnal space, the slow, calm certitude of the andante rose toward them. It was no longer a song of youthful conquest, but a hymn of thanksgiving, of peaceful gratitude. Jean, Jean. She could feel his presence, his virile tenderness, his human and yet infinite love. They were destined for each other. They had chosen each other quite simply, without grandiloquent phrases; they had recognized each other at the first glance, and had made their choice for all time. Man and wife, forever and ever. Just that—man and wife. No resounding phrases. It had all been quite simple, quite commonplace. The surroundings, the background, the incidents of their betrothal had been very ordinary, very banal. Simple and marvelous—gratitude, gratitude—

Her lips parted slightly in a little spasm of pain. For now, against the sonorous background of the hymn, the background of serene

prayer, the voice of a solo violin was rising up and detaching itself. She had been waiting for that moment. She knew what was about to take place, she knew that the moment was approaching when the blessed victim would offer herself to the holocaust. The song of the violin began in devout jubilation, David dancing in front of the Ark. It was an exultation outside of time, a hymn of confidence. Now the moment was near . . . now it had come. Now the voice rose step by step, toward the total surrender, the dissolution of self in the gift of infinite love. Human, yet infinite. Step by step it rose, and one no longer knew whether its modulations were those of utmost torture or utmost rapture, there was no measure now, there was nothing but that elevation, similar to the elevation of the Christian liturgy, whereby the voice strains with all its might toward the ultimate gift beyond love, beyond the tears of love, pouring itself out in the supreme sacrifice and attaining its superterrestrial end. Now it was silent. Everything had been fulfilled. The mystery had been accomplished. Only the deep and serene song of thanksgiving sounded on.

Then that song in its turn faded away and was dispersed, like a wave on the sand of the shore, imperceptibly dispersed into the silence. Silence. The bows became motionless. The crowd came up again to the surface of time, where one could breathe again. Up in the gallery, leaning against the balustrade, the student was hiding his face against his bent arm. Hélène had not opened her eyes. She was still lying back in her seat, one hand open on her lap, her head leaning slightly toward her shoulder, her throat bare. Her lips were imperceptibly parted. He looked at the young girl, knowing that he would never be able to stop loving her.

Now that the concert was over, they were walking along the dark avenue. Neither of them spoke. She was clinging to his arm, and once again he was filled by the painful sense of happiness that he had experienced a few hours earlier.

At the restaurant, she leaned back in her chair. A sad little smile lay on her lips, her features were slightly drawn and there were dark rings round her eyes. It seemed as though a merciless hand had forcibly imprinted the mask of weariness on her face. She did not speak. He had already noticed, especially since Jean's departure, how disconcertingly Hélène's face could change, passing almost without transition from radiant freshness to insignificance. Her beauty, free from any make-up—for she did not even use powder—blossomed out or faded like a

capricious meteor, according to the day or the moment, the lighting, but above all, to the actual tinge of Hélène's thoughts, her inner mood. She could seem several years younger or older from one minute to the next. Gérard had seen her radiant with charm and allure in the presence of Jean; then, at the very moment when Jean had taken his leave, overcast and dull like a landscape when a cloud hides the sun. She was like a delicately balanced mechanism, and it was just this quality of naturalness, this living fragility that he loved in her, among other things. He studied the other women surrounding them in the restaurant. The old ones looked like decrepit Jezebels, the young ones like immutable idols, gaudy Salambôs of the bazaar; they had devoted so much ingenuity to acquiring this petrified aspect, due to mascara, rouge, and lacquer that they really deserved to be desired. But Hélène was pure like a quite young girl emerging from the water. Pure and genuine, living and fragile. This evening, her beauty had suddenly vanished, her face was lifeless and tired, and yet Gérard gazed at her with love. When she was like this she seemed somehow closer to him. He would have liked her to rest her head on his shoulder. He no longer felt the slightest desire to tell her that she ought to visit a beauty parlor and have facial massage.

The restaurant was "luxurious," and the affluence of a clientèle that was too well dressed, too showy, too chic, made it appear vulgar; this was accentuated by the Hollywood décor of shining glass, chrome and parchment-shaded lamps. On closer examination, the guests were frankly despicable, even more despicable than the waiters. Only the Germans, soldiers as well as officers, had some dignity. The women seemed all to be more or less demimondaines. The young people, both boys and girls, looked like illustrations in a fashion magazine. All the men had the appearance of successful racketeers, with their fat, flabby cheeks, their listless and yet rapacious air. For most of them, the end of 1940 had been the dawn of their Golden Age. Now they were living in the midst of it, and every little tart had become a Danaë. If you strayed into one of the restaurant *de luxe* or into a first-class compartment on one of the main railways during the years 1942 and 1943, you could hardly escape the sudden revelation that France deserved to be destroyed. But unfortunately it was not quite as simple as all that; the modest and respectable old ladies wedged against the lavatories of third-class compartments in suburban trains, clutching a bottle of milk to their hearts, precious milk that they had obtained by dint of humble

supplications from some millionaire peasant farmer in the Loiret or the Seine-et-Marne, did they not furnish a living proof that France did not deserve to be destroyed?

Gérard did not like the restaurant. But he had invited Hélène to dinner and the only way to get a decent meal was to eat in one of these night spots. After all you can't invite someone to a meal of boiled spinach and dry cheese. The young man disliked the idea of contributing to the prosperity of the black marketeers; on this question, his principles resembled those of Cato. However, if you wanted to give a girl a treat and did not wish to appear a skinflint, you had to forget your moral principles for the time being and be willing to compromise with the indignities of the epoch. Finally there exist certain organic laws of a fairly intransigent nature concerning the minimum nourishment required to maintain human life. Cato would certainly have died of malnutrition in 1942-1943.

Hélène was consulting the menu. In a detached and epicurean manner, she announced her choice—all the least expensive items on the list. Gérard laughed; taking the menu from her, he ordered something more substantial. "And a bottle of red Médoc," he added to the maître d'hôtel. Hélène protested, alleging that she drank only water, but Gérard insisted. The maître d'hôtel, an old rascal who was not easily taken in, considered the two young people with affectionate contempt, his pencil poised in mid-air. When the Médoc had been definitely ordered, he bowed and said, "*Oui, monsieur.*" Médoc at 250 francs a bottle decidedly called for deference. "And see that it is well *chambré*," added Gérard, in the tones of an old gastronome who is accustomed to having the best. The maître d'hôtel suppressed a smile and bowed once more, "But, of course, monsieur," he said and walked away majestically.

"I envy you your self-confidence!" Hélène said laughingly. "People of that kind, waiters in cafés, headwaiters, and cloakroom attendants terrify me."

"Me, too. And when it comes to barbers! And tailors! They frighten me to death! That is why I try to play at the nonchalant *grand seigneur*. But I am afraid it makes no impression on them. Take taxi drivers, for instance. You just try the *grand seigneur* act on taxi drivers!"

"I've never tried. I've preferred to let myself be fleeced in silence."

"Oh, did they fleece you, too? It happened to me every time and I have never once protested. On the contrary, I gave them a royal tip, they intimidated me so."

"Fortunately, there aren't any taxis now."

"Yes, it's quite a relief, isn't it? It is one of the rare blessings of the war."

"Unfortunately, there still are headwaiters—but you're being simply superb with ours, I assure you."

"In your presence, I have the courage of a lion."

"My poor lamb! But all the same, I've got to scold you: it's very nice to play at being a *grand seigneur*, but it's expensive, and when you are with me, you shouldn't—I know you're not rich, so let's behave like old friends. I feel as though I were a kept woman."

"Idiot! To begin with, I'm in funds—it's the beginning of the month. Secondly, it gives me pleasure. Thirdly, you are not a kept woman, but a dear friend who is even more broke than I am. Therefore, it is only natural that I should offer my friend some good food when I am in a position to do so, once in a blue moon."

"You're sweet. And to think that I have been so nasty to you all afternoon."

"No, you haven't been nasty. And in any case I deserved it; instead of sharing your joy, I did all I could to discourage you. Just because I'm as jealous as a Moor."

They both laughed. The picture of the gentle Gérard acting like a jealous Othello was touching. For years, Gérard's love for Hélène had been the subject of affectionate jesting between them. The existence of this love was an established fact and it was equally established that Gérard did not expect it to be returned. For years they had succeeded in maintaining the perilous convention of friendship. It was always in a tenuous state of balance, a tacit agreement continually in danger of being denounced. This kind of tenderly mocking allusion was the surest method of approach, the only way of touching the continually open wound without causing pain. Gérard spoke of his jealousy with a smile, as though it were a romantic pose he assumed for fun. She commiserated with him in a bantering, friendly tone, entering into the game. It was as though he were adopting the mock-heroic style to amuse her, while she responded in the same manner.

Hélène leaned back in her seat.

"I must look awful," she said with a sigh. "I feel ugly."

"You are never ugly. Just now, you are looking rather wan. Take a little more wine, that will give you some color."

"No, thank you, Gérard. I've had enough to drink. It is strange how

I can feel my face changing from one minute to the next. It must be all the tiredness of the last two months that is coming to the surface."

"Have you had a lot of work?"

"Not more than usual. Six hours work at the lab, same as ever. But life in Paris is exhausting just now. The small things of everyday life have become such problems—ration cards, heating, and so forth. The subway, shopping, the daily struggle against cold and hunger, the wear and tear on one's clothes. Everything has become so horribly complicated. One lives on hope—but even hope can wear out. The way the news seesaws; one day you think the war will be over in two months, the next you can't see how it will ever end. And the rumors! After all, I'm not a complete half-wit, am I? And yet I swallow every tale without exception. It's frightening. My concierge, who knows how credulous I am, makes a game of me. About three times a week she will be waiting for me, crouching behind the window of her quarters, to tell me that Hitler is dead or that the Allies have landed during the night on the shore of the Landes. I think she does it on purpose, just to see my face next day. Don't laugh, it's perfectly true. My concierge is a sadist. However much I may be on my guard, I always end by falling into the trap. Because she is so good at it, so natural. And the references she gives me sound so utterly convincing! I assure you, she is a great actress. She could also be a first-class journalist. Well, she is my number-one purveyor of rumors. But I've had enough of it all, Gérard, I've had enough! A month ago, I was still following the operations in Russia on the map, feverishly moving my little German and Russian flags every day, according to the official reports. I've stopped doing it now. I feel as though the whole thing were a tremendous hoax, just to torture us slowly. Nothing will ever end. They say that hope is a theological virtue. I sometimes think it is one of the most sinister forms of torture inflicted on the human race. How restful it will be, the day when it is no longer possible to hope! You noticed this afternoon, how crazy with joy I was at the idea that the Americans had captured a foothold in Africa. Now I feel that it is only another trick in the universal hoax. But tomorrow, perhaps even tonight, I shall begin to believe in it again. It's silly to be like that, isn't it. I'm sure there must be a word for it in psychiatry. Do you know of a cure?"

"You are suffering from strain and fatigue, that's all. What you need is a two weeks' holiday. Are you going to Saint-Clar for Christmas?"

"No, Gérard, I cannot afford the fare right now."

"That is a question that should not come up, darling. I'm not Rothschild, of course, but after all . . ."

"That's out of the question, Gérard. Besides, it's not only the expense. You have to make your reservation a week in advance. You know what that means—standing in line for hours and hours at the ticket office. I just can't manage it. Besides, a week at Saint-Clar would not be a real rest. The house is not very gay. Of course, they are perfect pets, all three of them, and I love them dearly. But the atmosphere is not exactly what I would like just now. You know papa, he is the most adorable old man, but a bit exhausting after a while. Francis is sweet, but he is only a kid, a schoolboy. There's only *maman* left. Poor soul, she is kept so busy with the daily struggle of finding food for her family and she cannot think of anything else."

"So you will stay in Paris?"

"Yes, I have a friend at the lab who has asked me to spend Christmas at her home, in the suburbs near Rambouillet, I believe. She's a nice girl. It will be a change."

"You say that in such a gloomy way. Tell me, I cannot understand why you should be so pessimistic this evening. After all, you may have been quite right when you predicted the end of the war by next year."

Her face lighted up.

"Do you really think so?"

"It is not impossible."

"Oh, Gérard darling, if it were true, I think I'd give you a kiss. Jean would surely forgive me."

He looked down. There was an embarrassed silence that lasted a few seconds.

"Are you still without news of him?" Gérard asked, with feigned indifference.

"Yes," she said.

"Have you tried the Red Cross?"

"I have."

He thought of the terrifying chaos that now reigned in Europe and of the desperate efforts being made by thousands of human beings in order to find each other again or simply to call out to each other across the raging chaos. The gigantic hand of war had turned the whole surface of Europe topsy-turvy, sweeping men and women along the meridians and the parallels as chance would have it, like an angry player who sweeps the pawns from a chessboard. To an Olympian it must

present a most amusing puzzle. Marie, whose house at Dunkirk has been burned to the ground, seeks shelter in a rest center at Albi and sends messages by the Red Cross to Paul, whom she believes to be in Barcelona. But, as a matter of fact, Paul never got as far as Barcelona. He was arrested on the way, and is now working in a factory near Danzig, and sending postcard after postcard to Dunkirk. You could multiply all this a million times and change the situations and combinations ad infinitum, adding the extra seasoning of death in one case or the other. The Olympians must surely be splitting their sides with laughter. General topsy-turvydom, original chaos, unforeseen touring on a large scale, the entire machinery of Europe out of gear and running wild, timetables ruled by probability and as changeable as weather forecasts, arbitrariness ruling supreme, and millions of human beings drawn into a whirlpool, bewildered, stupefied, lost, and resigned, like a roomful of draftees in a French barracks the first day of their military service. It was as if a dim-witted sergeant, possessed by the dementia of Caligula, were wielding powers of life and death over the draftees. And above the general mess, somewhere in the invisible ether, night and day, unceasingly, the cracklings of hate and curses issuing from all the broadcasting stations of the world, to complete the forcible stupefaction of humanity. Hélène was right to speak of a universal hoax.

"I have sent in all six letters and two messages by the Red Cross," she was saying. "There has never been an answer. That's what gets me really down," she continued in a low voice. "This continual waiting and the surges of hope. It seems that in China, I can't remember where, they are in the habit of submitting political prisoners to this kind of torture. One evening you are told, 'The mandarin is examining your case and believes he can pardon you.' The next evening, 'Your head will be cut off tomorrow at dawn.' Then, just an hour before daybreak, the executioner comes into the cell and says with a kind smile, 'Look, chum, your execution has been postponed, the mandarin has decided to set up a commission of inquiry.' And so it goes on, for weeks and months, until in the end a gasping wreck is dragged to the block. Well, some days I am that wreck. You see, when Jean went away, I was prepared to wait quite calmly for several months, even for a year or two. I had all sorts of plans; to work for the exam, to read a great deal, and to see people. In a word, I wanted to be a living example of defiance, I wanted to stand up to misery and flout the future. Poor little fool that I was—it destroyed me instead."

"But today there really is reason to hope."

She shook her head gently.

"You said yourself that the business in North Africa means nothing."

He would have given his life to have been able to take back those words. Yes, at this moment he would have given his life not to have set out with gloomy fury to destroy Hélène's hopes.

"You shouldn't have believed what I said. I was jealous, and feeling low. Actually, looking at the African landing quite objectively, I think that anything might happen—tension in Germany, or all hell breaking loose there. I rather think the latter."

"You're only saying that to encourage me."

"No, I really believe it."

She sighed.

"Give me a little more wine. We can't afford to leave anything in the bottle, at the price they charge. Oh, I am being tactless. But as we're old friends—"

She smiled. He filled her glass and poured what remained in the bottle into his own.

"To Jean's speedy return!" he said.

At the same time, he was repeating to himself: "*The cavaliere servente*—the self-sacrificing lover—the faithful lamb—" But it no longer hurt him.

She emptied her glass in one gulp.

"To Jean's return," she murmured. "Yes, for me, peace will mean Jean—his presence. I am so terribly selfish, don't you think? . . . There is so much unhappiness today, an unhappiness so great that Christ Himself could not atone for it. And I who am young, fairly young at least, and strong and not in danger, I, who have actually no valid reason to complain, I do nothing but complain and despair, because— Oh, it's really rotten! Of course, I know that war brings out our petty egos, that everybody thinks only of himself and confuses peace with his particular kind of hope. But I would have liked to have been different from the crowd. I have tried, honestly. I have played at the benevolent Sister of Mercy in my spare time. I visited the slums on Sundays. You'd think that this kind of thing would be uplifting, but I find that it dries me up. I imagined that I was very brave. I wanted to be a little Florence Nightingale. But I am nothing but a spinster of twenty-seven, who needs the man she loves, a home and children and ordinary happiness

—a spinster of twenty-seven, who needs ordinary happiness and cannot bear to wait. It's funny, isn't it? I have committed the sin of spiritual pride and—”

“And now you are wallowing in humility, which is one of the most diabolical forms of spiritual pride.” He smiled at her and continued with assumed severity, “I know you as though I had made you myself. You are the proudest girl in the world. If you had gone into a convent, you would have insisted on performing the most revolting menial tasks, not in a spirit of mortification, but so that your Mother Superior, and later on God Himself might say, ‘There is Mademoiselle de Balansun, that admirable young girl, beautiful, intelligent and what not, who, instead of entering a contemplative order, for which she is absolutely cut out, has preferred to don the habit of a lay sister and devote herself to the task of cleaning the latrines.’”

Hélène burst out laughing.

“Do you really think that I would have worried about the Mother Superior’s opinion—or even that of God Himself? My own opinion would have been enough for me.”

Tilting up her chin, she raised her head and looked at Gérard with sparkling, mocking eyes, while her throat shook with rippling laughter. Suddenly, beauty was streaming from her smooth brow, her eyes and her teeth.

“You’re damnably proud,” he repeated, and his low voice quivered with secret admiration. “A daughter of Lucifer— But that’s the way I like you.”

He leaned toward her across the table.

“I like you very much, Hélène,” he murmured.

She laid a finger on her lips.

“Hush,” she said, still smiling, “forbidden zone.”

He went home on foot, the collar of his overcoat turned up, his hands deep in his pockets, for the cold was penetrating. He walked with a lively step. He was definitely happy about his day.

She walked along her street, her teeth chattering with the cold. Her room would be icy. She would go to bed at once. Tomorrow, she must get up at seven. Another day to get through: go to the lab, to the restaurant, come home, do twenty minutes sewing, go to bed. A day to get through. But today had been good. Dear Gérard! And the latest news was bound to change everything. It wasn’t just a rumor, this landing in Africa. She was convinced that some event of importance would take

place before Christmas. Something would happen. Hope, which had left her toward the end of the afternoon, rose again. Soon she would be submerged by a flood of hope. It was the old story, as monotonous as the tide.

A newsboy was announcing the news of Toulon. Gérard bought a paper and read the report. Then he crumpled up the paper, threw it into the gutter and hastened his steps. He winced, for one phrase had struck him like a blow. This same phrase he remembered having used to Hélène at the beginning of the afternoon, almost word for word: it described the sailors as the dupes of a mad and criminal order issued from the circles of the Resistance. He felt himself blushing, and hastened his steps as though trying to escape from someone.

Jean, where was he now? What was he doing? He would come back. A rising exaltation swept over Hélène, so that she almost ran the whole length of the street. He would come back. He would take her into his arms. He would be as he always was, calm, tender, and strong. She would lay her head on his shoulder with a sigh. She would say, "the night is over, we deserve to be happy."

As though he were trying to escape from someone— But he could never escape from that cruel remark of Hélène's, "as uplifting literature . . ." And he had spoken of the sailors of Toulon in the same terms as the paper that had sold out to the Germans. And he had published platitudes on the greatness of France in *La Gerbe*. He hastened his steps, his cheeks were burning. What a stinker I am! Here we are again, being masochistic. It was that remark of hers, that cruel remark. It was her contempt. I am a stinker who writes platitudes in *La Gerbe*. The shame of it. A festering sore that poisons and can destroy the brain. It is the shame that is so unbearable.

She pushed open the door and entered the icy hall, which was barely lit by a blue lamp. The concierge was crouching behind the window of her quarters. When she saw Hélène, she tapped on the pane with her finger, got up, and opened the door.

"Mademoiselle, I've got someone here who's waiting for you. The poor young man, he's been waiting about an hour."

"A young man?" Hélène murmured.

She felt her legs giving way under her. A mad notion flashed through her brain.

"What's the matter?" said the concierge. "You're not going to faint, are you?"

She seized Hélène by the arm and dragged her into the foyer.

She saw a tall boy standing in the little room, wearing a leather jacket. Hélène let herself fall into a chair.

"Excuse me, I just had a shock," she murmured. "I was expecting to see someone else."

"Exactly," said the boy, with a smile. He came toward her, holding out his hand. She looked at him in a disconcerted way.

"You don't recognize me," he said. "It's true that we've hardly ever met. I'm Philippe Arréguy, of Saint-Clar. Philippe."

*From Hélène de Balansun
to Jean de Lavoncourt*

Jean darling, we are going to find each other again, at last. I am wild with happiness. We are going to find each other again. Perhaps when you receive this letter, you will know what I mean. Perhaps this unknown man—I would like to thank him on bended knees—will have discovered where you are, and send Francis your address and news of you. In a few days, I am sure of it, I will have a letter from you, a letter in your writing! And then I will be able to breathe, to live again. Oh, Jean, sometimes I have thought you were dead. Because it seemed inconceivable to me that if you were alive you would not have found a way to send me a message, to reach me in some way. It is horrible, isn't it, that I should have thought this? Poor darling Jean, maybe at this very minute you are kicking your heels in a Spanish prison. If I could share your sufferings I would be the happiest girl in the world. Why didn't you want me to follow you? Can you imagine what our existence is like, my existence here, nothing but stagnation, ceaseless anxiety, darkness? Every day I feel tempted to leave everything, go away, and try to join you. If I were alone in the world, I would have done it long ago. Or rather, I would have followed you no matter what you said. I only need one word from you to know that you are still alive, somewhere, so that I can place you on one spot on earth, and I will be saved. Then I will have the courage to wait for you. The last few days I have been afraid, because I felt my hope failing. Time passed and I felt my hope crumbling away, like sand that runs through one's fingers. I was very afraid. You wait and wait like a helpless animal, then comes a moment, a horrible moment, when you wonder what you

are waiting for. And you get up and open your arms, to the first stranger passing by.

Jean darling, I am digressing. Forgive me those last lines. In the midst of my joy, they are the last wave of my distress. But now it's over; my distress has vanished forever. That friend of Francis' has promised to find you, to help you if need be. I have confidence. The end of the night is near. I want to believe. I want to hope, like a child, like a primitive, like a fanatic. Au revoir, darling Jean. Will you be able to read this scrawl? I have had to write across the lines, for my letter must be on one sheet only. Au revoir, my dearest, I kiss you and hold you to my heart.

This letter was handed to Mme Larrieu, of Saint Jean Pied-de-Port. As with the preceding ones, Mme Larrieu entrusted it to a smuggler she knew, who was to give it to a Spanish colleague on the other side of the frontier, who, in turn, was to mail it in his own village. When it reached the British Consulate at Pampeluna, it would be forwarded to Lavoncourt's address in Spain. Fagoage, the smuggler, was paid two thousand francs for this mission, a rather risky one, and carried out his task conscientiously. This time, while he was on the mountain, he thought he heard a dog barking and tore up the letter, for fear of being caught by a German patrol. The time before his Spanish colleague had opened the envelope out of curiosity, hoping, oddly enough, that it might contain money. Disappointed, and not knowing how to stick the envelope up again, he had thrown it into the fire. Another time, the letter had actually reached Pampeluna, but the clerk who should have forwarded it had suffered a liver attack during the night. He was in a vile humor and threw the letter into the wastepaper basket, grumbling, "the damn Frenchman!" Out of the six letters H  l  ne had sent to Jean, two had reached their destination, but only the first was delivered to Jean. The very day the second arrived, he had left Spain for England. He had asked a Spanish comrade to forward his mail, but the latter was arrested shortly afterward by Franco's police. So it happened that the letter landed in the hands of a Spanish concierge, who had it translated for her by her daughter's fianc  , who was a journalist; she kept it carefully, as a model love letter.

A Day in February, 1943

"Didn't I tell you not to bring watches? The guy we're dealing with won't touch 'em."

"O.K., O.K. But I know a bird who'll take them. I've palmed some off on him before; he's a jeweler from the rue de Rivoli. He's at the Ranelagh nearly every day at this time. He's probably there now."

"Well, look out. The boss doesn't like this kind of business, he says it's sappy to get pinched for that."

"You mug, who's ever heard of anyone getting caught in that racket?"

Philippe shrugged his shoulders. Really, Tony was full of crap!

"Listen," said Tony, "you'd be a dope to get yourself pinched by the cops for peddling watches, when I'm offering you a job that's so much more—profitable."

He arranged the bow of his tie with an important air.

"Much more profitable," he repeated proudly.

"What about it?" Philippe asked. "Your boss is a kind of cop, or am I wrong?"

"You're a bigger dope than I thought," said Tony. "The boss has nothing to do with ordinary cops. I've already explained all that. It's not even worth me wasting my breath. You trust me, don't you? I tell you again that the job is as official as can be. Only it's got to be on the q.t., got that? It's got to be on the q.t. for plenty good reasons."

He stopped, lit a cigarette and gave Philippe a mysterious look.

"For plenty good reasons," he repeated.

They were going up the Champs Elysées. The air was sharp and bracing, but sunny. Both young men were similarly dressed in lumber jackets and had thick-soled shoes on their feet. Their hair was brushed forward with a curl on the forehead. The general impression they gave was half student, half gigolo. Philippe was the taller of the two. Tony was slight, nervous, short legged, with a small pale face and mobile features, piercing eyes, and the profile of a young jackal, ingenuous yet fierce.

"Did you remember my brandy?" asked Philippe.

"You'll have it tonight, old man, I said so." He gave a little laugh. "So tonight's the big night?"

"Yes," said Philippe, "I'm tired of waiting around. Two months now that I've been softening her up, going slow. Hell, it's costing me plenty. Nylons here, food there. And I've got to take her to concerts, which make me sweat. I'm fed to the teeth."

"You don't know how to go about it," mocked Tony.

"I'd like to see you try. You've never gone in for that sort of game, distinguished and stand-offish bake."

"Is she a virgin?"

"And how! And a pain in the neck at that! She treats me like her kid brother! She preaches at me. She wants to reform me."

"Reform you? You haven't done anything to her."

"No, but she's not blind, you know. She knows I'm not going to college any longer, that I'm shifting for myself. She doesn't like it. She says that shifting for yourself leads to breaking the law."

"Why doesn't she join the Salvation Army? D'you want my advice? Ditch her! You can have as many dames as you like."

"Agreed. But she's the one I want. What I like is that she's ten years older than me, d'you get it? Besides she's a lady."

"Anyway, try to make her tonight. You're beginning to get me down with your virgins. It's been going on too long. I think it's making you look like a sap. Besides, the job we're going to do now won't leave you any time for these—relations. We'll be hustling around too much, and just making flying stops."

Philippe seemed absorbed in his own thoughts. He strode along with great steps, and Tony had to break into a trot to keep up with him.

"Say," Philippe asked suddenly, in a slightly anxious tone. "Your bird isn't—isn't—like you are?"

The jackal profile was twisted by a tight little smile.

"No," Tony said slowly. "You got nothing to fear there."

"I like it better that way," Philippe said peremptorily.

Tony blew clouds of smoke from his cigarette. In his eyes there was a gleam of rather baleful suffering.

"You've got the hide of an elephant!" he murmured, after a short silence.

Mme Arréguy was buttoning up the front of her dress before the mirror. A man of about forty with a bilious complexion was standing behind her and looking at her in silence. Through the windowpane, one could see a street of Saint-Clar, gray roofs sparkling in the cold

light of the morning sun. The room was heated by a sputtering gas fire that filled the air with its smell. At the foot of the unmade bed lay cotton pajamas and a pair of high-heeled shoes.

"When are you coming again?" the man asked in a gloomy tone.

"In ten days or so. I'm going up to Paris next Sunday. I have to see about my son. The little brute didn't come home at Christmas."

"Is he still at college?"

"I certainly hope so!" she snapped. "I've a feeling that he's not doing a stroke of work, but he'd better look out! I'm going to see for myself."

"You've boarded him out with your sister?"

"Boarded him out, if you like to call it that. She keeps him, see."

"She keeps him?"

"She feeds him and gives him a bed. Say, listen, what the hell did you think? My boy is eighteen. Eliane won't see forty again, besides she's his aunt, she saw him being born. What do you take us for?"

"I don't know, I'm sure. To me, your kid looks like a funny kind of youngster."

"Why don't you come right out and say that he's a pimp? Say he's a procurer!"

Powder puff in hand, Mme Arréguy was powdering her face and armpits with the ample vigor of a conductor leading a Wagner overture.

"Eliane is rich," she continued, calming down. "She can do that. I've done enough for her in my time. She can do that for me. She's with a gent who's stinking with dough."

"She had more luck than you, that sister of yours!"

"I should say so," she replied bitterly. "La Fernande did not pick the winning number, that's for sure. It's lucky I had Philippe."

The man came closer to her until he was touching her shoulders. He was smiling rather cynically.

"You love your son, don't you?" he said in a very low voice.

Mme Arréguy stopped powdering her face. Her hand still raised mid-air, she stared at the man's reflection in the mirror.

"What are you trying to get at?" she murmured.

He stepped back and turned his head away.

"Oh, nothing," he said airily. "I only meant that you are a most—admirable mother."

She gave him a quick look, as cutting as a knife.

"Do you think you can hand me that kind of line? Well, let me tell

you this; if I hadn't Philippe, I would have jumped into the Gave long ago. It's not the likes of you who'd have kept me back."

The man scratched his chest through his shirt. He had rings round his eyes and a very thin upper lip that showed his yellow teeth.

"And what about Werner?" he asked.

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Nor Werner no more either. He just takes my mind off things."

"By the way, I wanted to talk to you about that. Be a little more careful with your Boche. People are beginning to talk in town. I don't like that too much."

"You get my goat! It's nobody's business what I do. And what's more, the hell with the whole lot of them at Saint-Clar."

"Just as you like. But I warn you it may bring you unpleasantness one day."

"There are several fine ladies at Saint-Clar who are in the same boat. Ladies with whom you go to play bridge. Now, me, nothing scares me. But they! ah, la la, won't I laugh the day they're dumped in jail with Fernande Arréguy! That's why, chum, you needn't worry your head about me. Go on, pass me my furs."

The "furs," a trophy from the Burmese jungle, were a pathetic relic of bygone splendors. When Mme Arréguy shook her black mane over this moth-eaten cape, she reminded one of a lioness in a menagerie or an old panther, worn out but still indomitable.

"One minute," said the man, "I don't want anyone to see you coming out of here."

He went to the window and glanced at the street. Mme Arréguy, standing by the door, smiled scornfully.

"You give me a pain, all of you," she hissed through her teeth. "A lot of hypocritical bastards, the whole bunch of you. Cowards and hypocrites. All filth inside, full of dignity outside."

"That's enough," he grumbled. "I've heard all that before. You can go now, there's no one about."

Standing by the window, he dismissed her with a gesture. He watched Mme Arréguy emerge from the house and close the front door behind her. The brass plate on the door was inscribed: *Justin Darricade, Ingénieur des Travaux Publics.*

The bar in the basement of the Ranelagh was deserted except for two customers who were sitting at the end of the room. The electric

reflectors, concealed behind aquariums, spread a dim and greenish light. Tony advanced toward the two customers, followed by Philippe.

"May I introduce my friend Philippe, M'sieur Merkel?"

Philippe held out his hand to the corpulent gentleman called Merkel. The man raised his arm slowly. His hand was rather plump but fine, white, and well cared for. His face had a clerical look: an immense forehead, etched by noble lines, white silky hair, large pale cheeks, rather soft lips. An unctuousness that was both nonchalant and imperious softened his features.

M. Merkel stared at Philippe, looking him over deliberately from head to foot. Then he swiveled round slowly and turned to the man beside him, a small swarthy fuzzy-haired individual, the typical apelike type of Mediterranean man.

"It seems to me, my dear Allouche, that this young man should be suitable," he declared.

"Yes, boss," said Allouche.

M. Merkel pivoted round again, until Philippe was within his field of vision. M. Merkel was unable to turn his head. Perhaps he was suffering from a stiff neck.

"Philippe's a tough one," said Tony. "You can be sure of him, M'sieur Merkel."

The eyes of the boss were a metallic blue. Philippe, standing in front of this stout man with the episcopal features, who was staring at him in silence, shuffled his feet and blushed.

"Sit down," said M. Merkel.

His voice was gentle, unctuous, and firm.

"Maybe he is 'tough,'" he said, "but he is of the blushing species."

"Mustn't go by that," said Tony. "I've seen him in brawls at school. Mustn't trust him."

Philippe giggled foolishly. M. Merkel's reception unnerved him. The tall, hefty fellow seemed to have lost countenance entirely.

"Well, for my part, I trust him," declared M. Merkel.

"Me, too, boss," said Allouche.

M. Merkel smiled feebly.

"If that is so, he has won his case," he said. "Your perspicacity has never failed, Allouche. The amiable Berber, whom you see here beside me," he continued, addressing himself to Philippe, "and who answers to the caressing name Allouche, has furnished me with many a proof of his flair, his intuitive divination of souls. He is a fine psychologist."

A gentle malice made his steel-blue eyes sparkle. Allouche and Tony

exchanged meaning smiles; they seemed like a couple of young Levites enjoying the paternal badinage of their venerated high priest.

"The boss loves his joke," Tony confided to Philippe, in the manner of an initiate enlightening a neophyte.

"I believe our friend Tony has acquainted you with the activities and the aims of our little—association?" continued M. Merkel.

"Roughly, yes," said Philippe.

He leaned his elbows on the table. He seemed to be prey to a certain embarrassment, but determined to overcome it.

"Tony's told me what it's about, roughly. But I don't want to commit myself before I know all the details," he went on in a decided tone.

M. Merkel pivoted on his bench, turning in the direction of Allouche.

"He belongs to the blushing species, but he is full of determination," he murmured in his fine, distinct voice. "I like that. Indeed, I like it very much."

His body slowly swung round ninety degrees in the opposite direction, until he was facing Philippe.

"The essential thing is that you should be enlightened—roughly—on the aims we pursue and the means we employ. In principle, do you accept?"

"In principle, yes," said Philippe.

"Excellent. There is no need for you to worry about—the details. We have no rigid rules. Not even a rigid timetable. One week, we may be extremely busy, and the next almost completely inactive. It depends on the orders we receive from—higher up. As to the execution of the details, that is left to the inspiration of the moment. Is that not so, my dear Tony?"

This time, it was not the torso that pivoted, but merely the eyes.

"Sure, boss," said Tony.

"Tony renders me invaluable assistance in what concerns the—details. His powers of invention are inexhaustible and most fertile. I take pleasure in acknowledging that, united as they are with a charming amorality, they produce the most striking results."

"You're pulling my leg, boss," Tony said with a laugh.

"Not in the very least," protested M. Merkel gently. "There exists in you, Tony, a kind of precocious genius, a prodigal inventiveness." He made a short pause and his eyes pivoted from right to left.

"Let us remember Grenoble, my children."

At these words, the two Levites indulged in discreet laughter.

"The candle!" chuckled Allouche.

"Yes, the candle was worthy of the most inspired flights of fancy of Octave Mirbeau," agreed the boss.

Like a lighthouse in slow motion, he turned on his own axis, moving the beam of his metallic and sparkling gaze to bear on each member of his audience in turn. Allouche and Tony were smiling calmly and complacently; they acquiesced and were obviously accustomed to the rather strange manner of M. Merkel.

Only Philippe did not smile. He was frowning. His expression was fierce and obstinate. One could feel that he was about to burst out, "When will you stop buttering me up?"

M. Merkel forestalled the menacing outburst. All malice disappeared from his blue eyes.

"The essential," he said with unction, "the essential, I repeat, is that you should entertain no further doubts as to our aims and our means, and that you should accept in principle. I myself assume the administrative relations with—er, our occupants. Our association is regarded by them as regular, although the links with the officially recognized French organizations are infrequent. And it is far better thus, believe me. This kind of incognito robs you, of course, of the moral benefits that we might legitimately draw from our patriotic activities" (at these words, Allouche and Tony, as well as M. Merkel, looked grave and impressed), "but on the other hand it offers undeniable advantages, especially certain guarantees of security. You follow me, do you not?"

"Yes, I think I catch on," murmured Philippe.

He was scrutinizing M. Merkel's episcopal countenance with keen attention.

"Excellent," continued the boss. "Excellent. Outwardly, therefore, nothing distinguishes you from the ordinary: no uniform, no insignia. I must confess that I appreciate the secrecy. What is clandestine is delicate. I gladly leave parades, official pomp, and public glory to violent souls, simple ones. You, too, don't you?" he concluded, without a trace of irony, addressing himself to Philippe.

"It's O.K. by me," the latter conceded.

"I can't conceal from you that there are certain risks, even though I always try to go about my work in a, shall we say, clever rather than brutal manner. Nevertheless, the fact remains that certain risks do exist. I take it that you have no objection to this."

"Tony has told you that I don't object to a brawl," Philippe declared; he seemed to be slowly regaining his assurance.

"A well-born young man is not impervious to the stimulant of risks," said M. Merkel in a sententious tone, and there was not the slightest trace of malice in the expression of his eyes. "Yes, I think you and I will understand each other very well. Obviously I will have to ask you for some kind of formal agreement. Merely an administrative guarantee, which you can furnish me at my residence. Tony will take you there this afternoon. And, once again, don't worry unduly about the technical details; you will learn all that when the time comes."

"Agreed," said Philippe.

Tony was observing the slow evolutions of two little green and golden fish in the aquarium just above M. Merkel's head. The floating, silent dance of these minute monsters with their iridescent fins always fascinated him.

"But, you haven't anything to drink!" exclaimed the boss. "Forgive me."

He clapped his hands to summon the barman.

"So you are an old friend of Tony's," he resumed in a conversational tone.

"An old friend's not exactly the word," said Philippe. "I knew him at college. We're college pals."

"And Tony immediately discerned that you possessed the requisite qualities for our work," said M. Merkel, with charming affability. "He, too, is extremely perspicacious."

"Well, what do you think?" asked Tony.

They were going down the Champs Elysées after having accompanied M. Merkel and Allouche to the subway.

"He's O.K.," said Philippe. "At first I was a bit out of my depth, and he was beginning to get me with his talk."

"Don't mind that. It's his way. He's had quite an education, you know. I don't know whether I told you; he used to be in a monastery."

"In a monastery?"

"Yes, but he's been unfrocked. I've seen a picture of him dressed as a monk, with his 'colleagues.' He's well read, believe me. He can go on spouting for two hours without drying up. Most of the time you don't know whether he's joking or serious. What they call dry humor. But you just can't imagine what they do to people, those speeches of his."

"On what people?"

"On the sons-of-bitches. I've seen some, and tough ones, let me tell you, in Savoy, for instance, who'd turn green and end up by passing out just by listening to the boss talk to them like that, nicely, without shouting. You can't imagine what it does. The boss lectures them in his way for an hour or two, always with a smile. You can see them, who most of the time don't understand the first thing—neither do I, when it comes to that—but that doesn't matter, after half an hour they begin to shake in their boots. I think it's having the old bastard sitting in front of them spouting away without stopping, like a preacher in church. The sons-of-bitches can't stand up to it, you know. . . . Their nerves go—it's worth seeing—and they start shrieking all over the place. They're so scared, you see. The boss knows what he's up to."

"And doesn't anyone kick up a fuss?"

"Sure. There are some. Then we use the big methods."

His companion threw him a sideways look.

"The candle?" he whispered.

Tony's smile became accentuated.

"That's one of them."

"Explain," ordered Philippe.

"We only did that once, with a girl."

"Explain," repeated Philippe.

"If you like. Let's sit down."

They went to sit on a bench at the Rond-Point. Not far from them a few children, wrapped up in fur coats, were running after each other with shrieks of joy, watched over by an old nurse wearing a blue veil.

"Well," Tony began in a low voice, "the bitch pretended not to know a thing. Sealed lips, you know. The boss got tired of talking. He made a sign to us, to me and Allouche." He lowered his voice even more and leaned toward Philippe.

The nurse looked at the two young men, so smart in their lumber jackets. "How nice they look," she thought to herself. "What I like about the Rond-Point is that you only see fashionable people there."

"Then you've only got to light the candle," whispered Tony, "and wait till it burns down . . ."

"It's pleasant," thought the nurse, "to come here when the sun shines, to keep an eye on the children and watch the fashionable people go by."

Tony suddenly gave a little laugh. Through his half-closed eyes, he was watching Philippe, whose face was red and slightly convulsed.

"Joking aside, does it excite you that much?" said Tony.

"Let's go," said Philippe.

A letter from Gérard, Hélène thought impatiently. What did he want with her? She was cross with him because of the disappointment his letter had caused her. Every time the concierge handed her a letter, Hélène felt her heart miss a beat, an absurd and invincible hope constricting her breast. But every time, the handwriting on the envelope brutally dispelled her hope. "It's not from Jean." She could bear being disappointed by a letter from her parents or Francis. But by a letter from Gérard, no, that was the limit.

She went upstairs quickly, opened the door of her room and switched on the light. The room was as cold as a refrigerator. Hélène plugged in the little electric radiator, thinking, as she always did: "If only the fuses don't blow out!" That would be a nice mess, if the concierge were to find out that one of her tenants used an electric fire. She threw her handbag on an easy chair, her books on the desk; then she took off her coat and immediately put it on again, thinking it would be better to wait till the atmosphere had warmed up a little. If only the fuses didn't blow out this evening, she thought to herself. That would be awfully bad luck, with Philippe coming to supper. She glanced at her watch. Half past six. By eight o'clock the temperature of the room would be quite bearable, at least up to sixty degrees. Their teeth wouldn't chatter during supper. She held her hands to the electric fire for a few seconds, then she sat down by the desk. Pushing away Gérard's unopened letter, she pulled open a drawer and took from it a sheet of paper. It was a letter to Jean that she had begun to write three days ago, but had not yet found the heart to finish. Wrinkling her brow, she read over what she had written:

For two months I have been waiting for your letter, Jean. It ought to have reached me by now. Francis' friend should have found you. I should have received news. I do not believe in you any longer. The war will never end. I have not got the faith of Penelope. You used to think me a very sensible, quiet girl, and probably still do. Can you believe that a spark from my heart, at this very minute, would be enough to set the whole world on fire if the world were not already alight? My impatience devours me. My revolt, day after day, is killing me, because it is in vain and my cries are lost in the void. Poor darling, you have chosen the most unstable fiancée. And yet I know that if you were here, if by some miracle you were with me and I could feel the magic of your hand on my shoulder, all my misgivings would vanish, all my anguish would be appeased like a

dream, and death would no longer exist. But I no longer believe in the miracle of your presence. You are a phantom, lost somewhere on this earth. Have I still the courage to wait for your reincarnation?

What else can I tell you? Nothing happens. France is a dungeon with night all round, and nothing happens. You have to fight with all your strength, every minute, every second, to stay alive. From time to time I meet Gérard. In a word, nothing happens. Ah, yes, all the same. I also see a little boy from Saint-Clar whom you do not know, my darling; he is so handsome he makes you gasp, and he is wildly in love with me. He is a devil, you just can't imagine how wicked he is, but wicked in the way an angel might have been before the Fall, with that absolutely terrifying innocence. Don't say that I am assuming an Oscar Wilde pose and being stupidly decadent when I tell you that he would lose much of his seductive power if he were to lose this depraved innocence. (But I forget, you have never read Wilde. Darling Jean, what a tower of strength you are!) Well, in spite of this and because I am still a girl very *vieille France*, a girl with principles and ideals ("*toujours plus haut!*" don't forget!) I have appointed myself monitor to the angelic Philippe—his name is Philippe. Yes, little by little, I am forcing him to taste the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil. He does not bite hard, poor child, and sometimes after he has tasted, he will spit out the peels of this fruit—which is fairly tart, you must admit. But as he admires me very much and has a schoolboy passion for me, he tries not to complain too much. He is rather sweet. And so you see, I have two boy friends: Philippe the Cherub and Gérard the near graybeard. Youth must have its fling.

Apart from that, really nothing. Good news from Saint-Clar. I don't know what has hit dear papa, but he now speaks of you in every letter in moving, almost wildly enthusiastic terms. And yet Heaven knows how he disapproved of your departure, my poor darling. Sometimes he makes obscure allusions to your "triumphant return"—at others, you would think that he was afraid of compromising himself and he won't finish a sentence but writes instead a whole line of enormous exclamation marks, interlarded with significant question marks. I really cannot fathom what is going on now in the tenebrous soul of the noble lawyer, but there can be no doubt that great things are going on.

Why had she written all this? Rereading her letter, she felt a lump in her throat, a stinging in her eyes. Her expression hardened. She crumpled up the paper and threw it into the wastepaper basket. Why had she written these things? The desire to destroy, and to destroy herself. That residue of cruelty at the bottom of all suffering. She got up. Standing in front of the mirror above the mantelpiece, she stared long and fiercely at her own face. Twenty-seven. She touched the heavy circles round her eyes with her finger. She rubbed her cheeks, drew up the skin at her temples, but the circles did not disappear so easily. She began to laugh silently, thinking that she was like those advertisements for liver pills—before and after. She was like the photograph taken before the cure. Yet she knew that this evening, when she was freshly powdered and smiling under the soft lamplight, beauty would rise up again to the surface of her face, as a sunken treasure rises from the depths of the sea.

She came back to the desk and saw Gérard's letter. She tore open the envelope. It contained four closely written pages. Four whole pages!

My dear Hélène, how are you? It is now three weeks since I saw you last. You have dropped me without a word, which is bad. I would like to call on you this evening but I know you do not like these unannounced visits—especially mine. You received me so badly once, that I still cringe at the thought of it and I do not want to do it again! Seriously, though, how are you? I must admit that I did not believe for one moment the nice little story you told me the other evening over the telephone, when I called up to ask if I could take you out. It made me unhappy, Hélène. And I will not believe, I refuse to believe, that it is a matter of complete indifference to you whether I feel unhappy or not. You do care just a little for me, don't you?

Are you still seeing that boy you are so mad about? Oh, I know those words will make you jump, you reacted so violently when we last met (that was before Christmas, Hélène!) when I ventured to utter those words. What a clumsy fool I am! But it's too late now. I won't take them back; I scorn all afterthoughts, regrets, erasures, all those mean little pretenses. So it can't be helped, I'll leave the words, but please believe that it was only a mistake and that my thoughts are innocent. Do you still meet that boy sometimes? I suppose the enthusiasm you felt a month ago has already begun to cool down. Dar-

ling Hélène, what a funny little girl you are! During the ten years I have known you, how many of these passing crazes you have had! And not only for people, but for things and ideas as well. Remember Jacques Costellot? At twenty you thought he was "extraordinary," sparkling with intelligence, absolutely fascinating, and so on and so forth. Another time it was that student of chemistry at the Sorbonne; he swept you off your feet, I don't quite know why, possibly because he handled retorts and alembics with the greatest of ease. "The Sorcerer's Apprentice," do you remember? And Giraudoux! That was an abstract, intellectual passion, but how tiresome it was, darling! For three months, no one could drag you away from Giraudoux's books. You also clipped all the newspaper articles where his name was mentioned. But it gave me a marvelous evening at the Athénée—how far away 1937 seems now!—and for the sake of those hours when your pleasure, your confiding friendship made me so wildly happy, I gladly forgive Giraudoux. What else was there? Oh, yes, Greek sculpture. Six months at least. Here again, I bless Phidias, I bless Praxiteles, because I am indebted to them for two or three visits to the Louvre with you, and also because I could give you pleasure and very cheaply at that, my sweet, by presenting you with reproductions of Hermes or Apollo Sauroctonus.

Now, your latest infatuation disconcerts me a little. Without knowing the boy, it seems to me that his extreme youth would prevent you from finding him interesting. You have assured me that he is "funny," that he amuses you, that he is fresh and alive, and that he needs someone more mature to direct him, to keep him from doing foolish things. That may be. Nevertheless, it is a curious and unexpected way of playing Florence Nightingale, don't you agree?

Ah, now you are getting angry! Forgive me this harmless teasing, Hélène. I am a little unhappy. You see, when your infatuations are centered round a great man (by preference, a dead one) or an abstraction, I feel reassured. What's more, I embrace them too. I share your tastes, I manage to catch your craze like an infection, so that it forms another link between us. But when you go overboard for a human being of the masculine gender, and a very young one at that, poor Gérard does not relish it. And yet it isn't that I am jealous, Hélène. To begin with, I know by experience that your infatuations pass as quickly as a cold in the head. Above all, I know *who* you are, darling Hélène, and how pure, proud, and incorruptible your nature is. And finally, for the last ten years I have known the math-

ematical "constant" of your life, the great lines of force. I am not jealous of Jean, even though I may have appeared to be so at times. But, Hélène, I want our friendship also to be a "constant" in your life—a small one, of secondary importance, but nevertheless a "constant." There are moments when I doubt it, and that hurts.

No more of that. Actually, I wanted to talk to you about something else in this letter. At our last meeting (before Christmas) I tried to broach the subject. But I was not able to create the right atmosphere, to find the right tone. . . . You were so busy talking about young Arréguy, so strangely lighthearted and gay, that if I had spoken of my own anxieties, they would have produced a sour note.

By letter, it will be easier to explain all this with some degree of coherence.

The matter in question is a change that has taken place in me, and I owe this change to you. Do you remember the afternoon we spent together, on a Sunday in November, when we went to a concert? We had been quarreling a little and the afternoon might have been painful, even completely ruined, if Bach had not swept away our little differences with his divine breath. But you had said one or two very harsh words, in that icy tone you can sometimes assume so well. Later on that evening, I realized how these words were eating into my soul like poison. I realized how you despised me. It was a terrible discovery, Hélène. It is an intolerable experience to find yourself despised by someone you love and admire. All those little doses of poison you had injected in me, without my even noticing them at the time, suddenly began to produce a horrible burning pain. Hélène, I owe it to you that I experienced, in my actual physical body, a feeling that must be of the same nature as the flames of Hell, but which purifies what it consumes: shame. I have known what it is to suffer because I was neither this nor that, not a great leader, or an artist, or a creator; I suffered because I was timid, ignorant, uncultured, because I lacked audacity and energy. I had suffered all the ordinary complexes that afflict young men. But I had never known what it is to be ashamed. That evening, Hélène, I understood that you were right to love Jean and that you were also right to despise me.

"A weak fellow who writes platitudes on the greatness of France in *La Gerbe!*" I repeated that phrase to myself. If words could kill, those words would surely have killed me. I am surprised that no one

has ever thought of drawing a moral, or even evolving an abstract theory, from the pure and simple experience of shame. Since 1940, I have been oblivious to what was happening. I believed that my attitude of passive resignation was the only one that was both sensible and dignified. I believed that one could accept the offer to collaborate with a victor. I had never known that reaction of fierce pride, similar to the reflex action of a proud wounded animal, which has drawn thousands of the finest Frenchmen to the Resistance. Your scorn made me realize how my attitude was. I am ashamed.

And so it went on for two more sheets. Hélène glanced over the four pages black with his small handwriting. One sentence drew her attention: "I shall no longer write reviews for *La Gerbe*." She shrugged her shoulders. Great Heavens, how could that interest *her*? Poor Gérard! Continually involved in complexes, inhibitions, "problems"! the experience of shame, today. And at the bottom of it all, what was the reason for this fine revulsion of feeling? Simply that he wanted to see her, Hélène, again, that he clung to her desperately and was ready to do anything. Poor Gérard. So he had resigned from *La Gerbe*. Was that all? But that wouldn't change him: a person without individuality, without personality, without vitality. At least, it would not alter his looks, so dull, so insignificant. Condemned, Gérard. You will be you in all eternity. You will be, in all eternity, the faithful companion for whom I have felt pity, an absent-minded fondness, occasionally a momentary affection, but whom I shall never love.

She read the last lines of his letter:

Now I am worthy of your friendship, Hélène. Never have I felt so worthy of it. This must move you a little and surely will find the way to your heart. You cannot refuse to see again your old friend, who is as always affectionate, faithful—and grateful.

Slowly, she crumpled up the sheets with a gesture of infinite weariness. But of course she would see Gérard again. Naturally she would see him. Why not, in the name of Heaven?

She got up and slipped out of her coat, for now the radiator had begun to warm the room. Then she passed into the tiny kitchen. There were still some apples in the cupboard and a few lumps of sugar left over from the month's ration—a little corn meal as well. Good, she would make apple fritters. Philippe had said that he liked them very

much. This was the first time Philippe was coming to dine with her. She pictured him sitting opposite her at the table, under the halo of the lamp. His gleaming teeth, his eyes, wide open like those of a wolf, the pure lines of his jaw and his neck. The touching quality of his type of beauty: that of a gamin, innocent, unsophisticated, but tough. Suddenly she remembered, with a burst of irritation, a sugary insidious phrase in Gérard's letter: "... a curious and unexpected way of playing Florence Nightingale." The good Gérard often surprised you with his old-maidish little digs. Oh, if he had been here, what a look she would have given him. In what acid tones she would have said, "You know, my little Gérard, it is very pleasant to play Florence Nightingale to a young waif as attractive as Philippe. I feel the need of refreshing company—for a change." She raised her head defiantly. Yes, it was pleasant, and, oh, God! how it helped to pass the time! With Philippe, she felt herself growing younger. Gaiety flowed into her soul as from a spring which has suddenly been freed. He was overflowing with electric vitality. He was sweet and generous. And he admired her. It was amusing, and flattering, when you came to think of it.

She went into the bathroom and prepared herself carefully. She had bought a lipstick, rouge, and powder. It was the first time she had used them. She looked in amazement at her face now transformed, a theatrical face, hard and artificial like a mask. Now I look like the "*Madone des sleepings*," she thought. The humor of the comparison made her smile. She smiled too at the idea of this intimate supper with a boy ten years younger—the situation reminded her of a dime novel—fairly spicy under the circumstances. Shameless great lady dining by candlelight with a J3. . . . Extremely Marcel Prévost. *Lettres à Françoise libertine*. She laughed aloud.

She stretched herself out on the couch and, still in the spirit of fun that had awakened as she made up her face, she assumed various poses—sexy poses, to which she added a touch of burlesque, of Hollywood cliché that made her laugh till she cried. Mlle de Balansun, Catholic scoutmistress, in the pose of the "Blue Angel" . . . Mlle de Balansun, degree in physics and chemistry, as the "Légionnaires' pin-up girl." She sank back on the couch, shaking with silent mirth. These roles sat on her about as well as a pair of socks on a serpent. She remembered when she was a schoolgirl with stiff pigtails, of whom everybody said, "What a gawk she is at times!" She saw herself as an adolescent, playing tennis like a boy, but unable to hand a cup of tea without dropping it. That was the Hélène that Gérard had dubbed "the Amazon." The girl who

discouraged the young men who wanted to dance with her at Jacques Costellot's surprise parties by her lack of *abandon*, who dressed in thick woolen sweaters like an English governess and became entangled in the long skirts of her bridesmaid's dress at the weddings of her friends; who had no patience with lighthearted fun, flirtations, gossip, and hen parties; who, knowing herself to be beautiful and desirable, would have blushed at the thought of wanting to appear seductive. She had decided never to profit from her natural or acquired assets. ("Your pride will ruin you, mademoiselle!" the College Chaplain had said to her one day.) Grave as a vestal virgin and forever carrying a torch for her enthusiasm of the moment—be it the scout movement, the Mutual Aid Society, science for the good of mankind. And all the while she was deeply conscious of being "well born," an aristocrat by birth and bearing and glowing with a secret, almost insensate, pride. It was in the name of that pride that she exaggerated her natural scorn for feminine attributes, feminine vanity, and sentimentality, her liking for sports, for serious mental discipline, and for masculine companionship. She had always felt that she dominated by her strength of character—if not by her superior intelligence—most of the people who came in contact with her. Nevertheless, she was liable to sudden and ardent enthusiasms—those "infatuations" Gérard mentioned in his letter—and yet she had been ready to yield everything and give herself completely to a man she knew to be intellectually her inferior, but whom she loved with all her heart—to Jean. Before Jean, she had felt, once or twice, a faint stirring of the senses; she had been ashamed, not as of a sin—the notion was alien to her—but as of a vulgar weakness. Since she had known Jean, she no longer felt ashamed. The Amazon had become far more human.

Stretched out on the couch with her eyes closed, she waited for the bell to ring. The chill was off the room now, later on it would be quite warm. When the bell shrilled she jumped up and went to look in the mirror above the mantelpiece. There was a photograph leaning against the glass of a young man in uniform wearing the Saint-Cyr tie. Hélène picked it up with a hesitating movement and walked toward the cupboard. After a second's further hesitation, she opened the cupboard and laid the photograph on top of a pile of linen. Then, closing the cupboard, she went to open the door of the room.

It was eleven twenty by the little alarm clock on the mantelpiece. Aromatic smoke filled the room. Philippe had brought Turkish cigarettes. Hélène had ceased to worry where he found these cigarettes.

Hadn't he also brought some cakes made with "pure sugar," a bottle of Martell cognac and one of Burgundy? He was a miracle boy and it was best to accept the fairy gifts without asking questions. Questions were only embarrassing. And H  l  ne had no wish to be embarrassed this evening. She had drunk two glasses of Burgundy and a small glass of brandy. She was smoking a delicious Turkish cigarette. It was pleasant in the room, intimate, warm, agreeable. All the more so because she knew that outside it was freezing. H  l  ne felt almost disembodied, floating in an aura of gentle well-being. The pulsing of the blood in the arteries of her wrists alone gave her the sensation of having a body. Through the haze of smoke, she looked at Philippe, in the luminous halo of the lamplight. He had taken off his tie and unbuttoned the collar of his shirt. His skin was smooth and golden. His suit was made of a rich and luxurious woolen material. In the halo of the lamp, she saw a big boy, innocent and unsophisticated, with tousled hair. In the light he looked ripe and shining, like a beautiful fruit. She never tired of looking at him: it was so restful. The Hermes of Praxiteles. But he was alive, his wolflike eyes bright in the warm light. What was he talking about? He had amused her during the meal, often quite unwittingly; he didn't always realize how funny he was. He had even told her a few jokes that were slightly shocking, but related with so much spirit that she had laughed without the slightest embarrassment. Now she was hardly listening to what he was saying. She was aware of the sound of his fresh, mocking voice, of its rather brutal accents. The blood was pulsing in her veins. But she was swimming in a state of euphoria, floating on dense clouds of aromatic smoke.

Suddenly, as he became entangled in a rather involved sentence from which he seemed unable to extricate himself, she had a vague impression that he was putting on an act. He was pretending to be drunk. It was an imitation of the famous drunken scene in "*Les vignes du Seigneur*" but the act was overdone and somehow he was giving himself away.

From then on, things happened fast.

"Philippe, drink up your cognac like a good boy and go home. It is late."

"Good Lord!" he exclaimed, pointing to the alarm clock with an unsteady movement obviously aping drunkenness. "Half past eleven! I can't go home. I—we've forgotten the time."

H  l  ne crushed the stub of her cigarette in the ash tray and rose to her feet.

"I'm very sorry," she said calmly, "but I can't possibly keep you here, my dear boy."

She opened the window to let in the night air.

"We must air the room," she said. "It's like a smoker in here."

"Are you crazy? What are you doing? Have you forgotten the blackout?"

"The window opens on an inside court, you know that. It can't be seen from the street."

"Oh, they can't—they can't see us?" he stammered.

Their looks crossed.

"Philippe, my boy," she said calmly, "don't pretend to be tight. You're not."

He pretended to rise with an effort, holding on to the table with both hands.

"Course, I'm not tight, M^{rs}elle Hélène. Who said I was drunk? Look at me! I can stand up, can't I?"

Hélène was leaning against the window sill, inhaling the fresh air, which cooled her. She shivered and closed the window. Her slight intoxication had completely vanished.

"You must go now, Philippe," she repeated firmly. "Stop acting the fool."

He looked at her mockingly.

"Of course, I'm not drunk," he said insolently. "But the fact is that I can't go home now. I've certainly missed the last subway."

"You can walk."

"Out of the question, my girl. I don't want to get myself picked up by the patrol. You know how easy it is to get sent to Todt or to Germany."

Hélène's hand went to her throat. She felt fear slowly mounting, threatening to suffocate her. This Philippe, standing before her with such brutal resolution, was not the innocent gamin of other days. She realized that she was losing ground.

"Come on, Philippe," she begged. "Be decent. You know very well that you can't stay here. I . . . I've only got this room."

"You'd rather I was picked up and thrown in the jug? That's a sweet one. You have a guy come in to help you pass the time and when you've got all you can from him, you throw him out and the hell with him."

Hélène was terrified by this sudden vulgarity. She protested feebly.

"That isn't it at all, Philippe. I'm sure you can get home quite safely."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Women!" he exclaimed. "An hour's walk from Vaugirard to the Trocadéro, and she thinks it'll be 'safe.'"

He sat down straddling a chair.

"I'm sorry, my dear, but I haven't the slightest intention of getting picked up by the Germans."

"Oh, God . . ." murmured Hélène, in a trembling voice.

"You aren't going to start whining all over the place because I'm spending the night, are you? I can sleep on a chair."

"A chair . . ." she stammered brokenly. She was no longer the lady of easy virtue of before dinner . . .

"And what's more," declared Philippe, rising to his feet, "I don't see why I should sleep on a chair when there's a perfectly good bed. . . ."

He came closer to her with a sneering, sly laugh, and suddenly put his arms round her waist. "And especially when there's a lovely girl like you. . . ."

She was going to cry out: "You skunk!" and slap his face. A picture crossed in her mind and paralysed her. It was a scene from a movie, she couldn't remember which, where a woman had called a brute "You skunk" and boxed his ears with all her might. Grotesque. The scene was grotesque. No, she could not play the role of the outraged princess. Besides, "skunk" was the sort of thing a woman of easy virtue might say. She had been silly enough to fall into the simple trap that had been set for her by this schoolboy. She burst out laughing. "What a fool I am!" Philippe was disconcerted and loosened his hold. Hélène felt that she must take advantage of his confusion and regain the upper hand. She stared at the young man with disdainful amusement.

"Of course you can sleep here, my little Philippe. On the chair. Nasty little boy. . . . You think you're hot stuff, don't you, with your little tricks. Poor little dope . . . Come on, stop being the gangster, it doesn't suit you at all. You look like a cherub pulling St. Peter's beard."

"Now what do you know," he cried ironically. "A cherub . . . really."

He pressed her close to his body and fastened his lips to her mouth in a long kiss; then he let her go and heaved a deep, happy sigh, "For three months I've wanted that," he murmured. "Three months I've wanted just that. . . . You can bet I wasn't going to muff this chance."

Hélène opened her eyes. She made an effort to smile.

"Fool," she said, trying to adopt a cutting tone. "You're behaving like a fool, like a vulgar little schoolboy. You disgust me. This scene is unpleasant enough, God knows, but what's more, it's ridiculous."

"Words!" he said, taking off his coat. He calmly hung it over the back of a chair. "Nothing but words! As for the little boy angle, that doesn't cut any ice. I'm a big boy now. Height five feet nine; weight 154 pounds stripped; physical coefficient six. That's not bad, you know."

She leaned against the cupboard, feeling desperate.

"So you don't want to go?" she said flatly. "Would you rather I called the concierge—or the police?"

"See if I care—I'm a minor."

She clasped and unclasped her hands with a gesture of horror.

"For the last time, please go away, Philippe, if you want us to stay friends."

"We're going to be lovers, that's much better."

He was busy methodically verifying the contents of his wallet. Carefully he folded the permanent "*Ausweis*" that he had received from M. Merkel a few hours earlier. It would permit him to circulate all night without being molested by patrols. Then he sat down on the edge of the bed and began to untie his shoelaces. Without haste, he divested himself of his sweater and his shirt. His torso appeared smooth and golden under the light of the lamp. In the midst of her distress, Hélène suddenly remembered the fragment of a poem that had once stirred her: "*Garçon bestial, fleur de haute stature.*"

It was idiotic to remember this poem now. Perfectly idiotic. She remained leaning against the cupboard, unable to move or speak. What could she do? He was not going. Impossible to call the concierge—the scandal. She felt utterly exhausted. He got up and came toward her, then he took her into his arms gently, with something resembling tenderness.

"Come," he said in a low voice. "You want it too."

"That's not true," she cried.

Tears shot into her eyes. She was aware of the young man's hand unfastening her dress. Sobbing, she pushed him away. He allowed her to draw back from him. He was standing before her, like a great wild beast, royal and magnanimous.

"It's not true?" he whispered. "Then why did you hide the photograph that was on the mantelpiece? Why did you hide it this evening?"

She raised her head without troubling to wipe away the tears that ran down her cheeks. But she had stopped weeping. Vast walls of darkness were collapsing in her mind; her desperate waiting, her misery, her pathetic efforts to hold out in the face of the universal chaos, the absurd futility of her life. . . . Vast walls of darkness were collapsing,

a soundless cataclysm, in an infinite fall among stifled laughter, the head of Hermes in profile turning like a dead leaf, and the words of the half-forgotten poem: "*Garçon bestial, garçon bestial . . .*" He was standing before her, smooth and golden, his teeth flashing, his torso and his feet bare, in the light. She heaved a long, deep sigh. She, too, was standing, at arm's length from him, erect, alone, without defense, without hope her face bathed in tears. Everything was unbelievably simple. An end to hoping, an end to waiting. An end to hope and despair. A somber exaltation rose in her. The blood throbbed in her veins. When this had been done, everything would be over; there was no possible return, no compromise with heaven or earth, no pardon. She knew Jean. Above all, she knew herself; that was enough. In this abasement she would find peace at last. Everything was collapsing in a silent, unending fall, amid small, high-pitched laughter and the profile of Hermes, turning slowly in the void. "*Garçon bestial, fleur de haute stature*" nameless, nameless. Unbelievably simple; nothing was left but this nocturnal silence, this icy night surrounding the warm room, and the golden shore of that welcoming breast. She raised her head a little more. Her eyes gleamed, and her lips parted in a faint smile, in which there was defiance, pride, and the lust of consummating a destruction. She lifted her hands slowly, the palms turned upward. She raised them to her face and deliberately wiped away the traces of her tears. Then her hands came to rest, like slow birds, on Philippe's shoulders.

"Yes," she murmured, "I want you, too."

Dawn was filtering through the window curtains. The room was cold. Everything had been left in disorder on the table, plates, bottles, ash trays with their little pyramids of cigarette butts. The clothes, hung over the backs of chairs, looked like empty marionettes. The gray light of the dawn insinuated itself into the room and seemed to ooze down the walls. Hélène opened her eyes, shivered, and closed them again immediately. She stretched one arm out of the covers, drew the blankets up to her chin and pulled back the eider down that had partly slipped to the floor.

Oh, if only the sun would never rise again. If only they could remain together forever, like a pair of closely intertwined chrysalises, buried in the hot drowsy torpor of the bed. She must crush the wretched, quivering gleam of consciousness that rises with the dawn. She must remember nothing, anticipate nothing. Crush down the shivering glimmer of consciousness. Not even recall that black wave of happiness, that tor-

nado of happiness, as intense as an agony of pain. To be nothing more than a chrysalis buried in the very depths of this hot sleep, pressed against the other burning chrysalis. To be nothing but that drowsy warmth, the embrace of that arm, the single breath and the scent of this twin body. Deep in the night, in the night forever. Let everything else cease to be, let the sun never rise again over the earth. But let this twin body live on eternally, for it is the divine solution to all anguish, the dark heaven of matter reconciled at last into infinite rest, infinite peace. Yet dawn was trickling down the walls. The sun would rise, mercilessly.

The other body started in its sleep, started and stretched itself like a wild animal, was on the point of awakening; then, with a soft moan, he had recaptured his being and his solitude, he became once more the other, the stranger, the enemy, separate and inaccessible.

She opened her eyes again, softly raising herself up in the bed and leaning on her elbow. In the half light of the dawn, she contemplated the strange face beside her, the young face with its closed eyes surrounded by imperceptible rings, the mouth a little swollen from sleep. The cold slipped under the raised covers and a shiver traveled over the smooth chest like the breath of the sea over the sand. Then, without raising his eyelids, he stretched out one arm, clasped his companion with an unconscious gesture, puerile and imperious, and drew her toward him.

Part Two

A DAY IN APRIL, 1943

1.

MME COSTELLOTT cared less and less to meet the Comte de Balansun. Not only did his constant agitation exasperate the lady, who considered him senile, but of late the old solicitor had conceived a partisan passion as unexpected as it was ill-advised; damn it all! he was becoming a Red! He would comment with visible satisfaction on the elastic withdrawals of the German armies in Russia. Several times a day he would repeat, with the mien of an Olympian who observes disinterestedly the vain agitation of the human ant heap that "the Wilhelmstrasse is lost in advance against the coalition Kremlin—White House—Foreign Office." Mme Costellott had to hold herself back with all her might not to quarrel with the old gentleman. She affected an attitude of indulgent pity, without realizing that she was making no impression, as M. de Balansun was far too self-assured to be susceptible to a contempt that he usually even failed to notice.

On this particular day, the Count, M. Lardenne and Mme Costellott were sitting at the bridge table in Mme Delahaye's drawing room. The rubber was almost over. Mme Delahaye was dummy, a role she delighted in. She only played bridge out of loyalty to bourgeois traditions and social conventions. The inhuman severity of this well-bred pastime exhausted her. Therefore she looked upon the functions of dummy as a happy respite which permitted her to escape for a few minutes into spiritual regions of a vaguer and more comforting nature. It might even

happen, in this fictitious and fugitive Beyond, that she would meet some illustrious shades, Beethoven or Fauré, for instance, whereupon she would salute them by softly humming a melodic fragment from the Seventh Symphony or "Penelope," as the case might be. These spells of absent-mindedness enchanted M. de Balansun; he would draw the attention of the others to Mme Delahaye by elaborately miming his restrained amusement; he wriggled in his chair and finally burst out with his standing joke, "Our dear Cécile will never be able to submit to the discipline of bridge! Remember, my friends, for a birdlike brain such as hers, bridge is a Chinese puzzle, an astronomical problem! This little girl should have been born in other times and under other skies. She was made for the salons of Mme de Pompadour, the Palaces of Salzburg, the nocturnal serenades on the Thames under the glorious reign of Handel!" (M. de Balansun, broadly impressionist, often mixed up both styles and chronology.) "Look at her blushing like a guilty schoolgirl! She is adorable, simply adorable!"

After this brief interlude, the Count would once more become absorbed in his hand; without the slightest transition, he assumed an expression of concentrated calculation, painful concentration, and almost tragic intensity, as though the destinies of the world depended on the outcome of the game. He breathed deeply, rubbed his finger against his nose, threw a suspicious look at his partner (a purely formal suspicion, for M. de Balansun would have played bridge quite calmly with Al Capone or Stavisky) and then, clutching a card, he threw it down with a great fatalistic gesture, emitting a muffled exclamation.

M. de Balansun, who consecrated most of his leisure to compiling a treatise on the Surprises of Bridge, considered himself as a deeply cunning player. Nevertheless, M. Lardenne, beneath his feigned nonchalance, was far the better of the two; even with a partner as deplorable as Cécile, the banker usually won the rubber.

At teatime Mme Delahaye pulled the bell rope to advise the maid that it was time to bring in the tray. The guests drew closer to the fire. M. Lardenne lit a cigar, Mme Costellot a German cigarette (von Brackner gave her a pack from time to time). M. de Balansun had no liking for tobacco and desired his family to share his distaste; in this matter he showed a positively Puritan intolerance. Theoretically, the Count reserved his ration of Gauloises for purposes of barter with the tradesmen, but in practice, he distributed it to his friends at the club, merely in order to hear them call him, with a touching gratitude whose irony escaped him: "Balansun the Magnificent!" Of course his friends at the

club never offered to pay for the cigarettes, an offer which the Count would have rejected haughtily; he was as disinterested as only beggars, gamblers in debt, and impecunious members of the decayed nobility can be.

While Berthe was disposing the contents of the tea tray on the table, a conversation began: M. Lardenne, who had spread *Le Patriote des Pyrénées* over his knees, congratulated his friend on the serial story that this paper was now publishing: "*Un grand seigneur béarnais: Gaston le Roux. Par le Comte Léon-Martin de Balansun.*" The last installment, describing the lavish banquet that Gaston had offered to the chronicler Froissart, had aroused M. Lardenne's admiration. Mme Costellot insinuated unkindly that a menu based on produce from the black market would have assumed the same literary merits in Victor's eyes. M. Lardenne protested—no, what had fascinated him in this brilliant passage was its quality of exquisite historical erudition, exhaustive yet free from pedantry, actually far superior to the ostentatious archeological display of *Salambô*. M. de Balansun accepted this advantageous comparison of his own gifts as an author with those of Flaubert, without false modesty. "That Normand was solid, my dear Victor," he declared, "but I must admit, somewhat heavy." Mme Costellot asked rather offensively how, in an epoch as convulsed as the present, one could be interested in the paltry provincial quarrels of an insignificant feudal baron. "But wait for the sequel!" cried the Count. That was just it, let her wait for the sequel! M. de Balansun was not the man to retire to the ivory tower of sumptuous romantic evocations, or devote himself to the Parnassian cult of a sterile beauty. He had interlarded his story with allusions of the most burning moment. The whole value of the novel lay in this cunning transposition. They thought they were dealing with an agreeable and harmless historical romance? Pah! They were dealing with a political pamphlet! There, now murder was out: the Count had written a political pamphlet. They would see! He rubbed his hands in mischievous anticipation. They would have a good laugh, under the very noses of "*ces messieurs.*" Mme Costellot rejoined that "*ces messieurs*" had other fish to fry than to scrutinize the serial columns of the *Patriote* in order to discover a timid dissident provocation. M. Lardenne felt that they were getting on to dangerous ground; hoping to maintain a friendly atmosphere, he congratulated M. de Balansun on his courage, but advised him to be prudent. M. de Balansun would not hear of it. He was prepared to let himself be roasted alive for his political pamphlet. He informed Victor that, in a subsequent installment, he

would be able to enjoy a letter from Gaston le Roux to the king of England, in which the lord of Saint-Clar solicited the help of the powerful monarch "against a felonious neighbor, who had possessed himself of his lands by deceitful ruses." Was the allusion clear enough? The felonious neighbor across the Rhine, the deceitful ruses of the fifth column? Was it enlightening enough? M. Lardenne thought that it was not only enlightening, but even a little too daring. Mme Costellot expressed her surprise that Gaston le Roux should have been so lamentably devoid of dignity as to invoke the aid of France's hereditary enemy, and solicit the help of Albion which, at that very moment, was occupying Aquitaine! She embarked on a violent discussion with the Count on the ticklish question of the Hundred Years' War. She invoked Joan of Arc, who flew up from the stake like a phoenix to hasten to the aid of this fierce enemy of England. M. Lardenne and Mme Delahaye were merely the unhappy and helpless spectators of this oratorical tourney. M. de Balansun, who had a special cult for the Pucelle (his hero worship also extended to Gaston le Roux, Saint Louis, Louis XIV, Napoleon, Pasteur, Delcassé, and Mme Polaire) protested sorrowfully when Mme Costellot stabbed him in the back in this fashion. In a choking voice, he asked his adversary to remember the nationality of the ecclesiastical tribunal that had condemned the virgin of Dorémy to the flames. "They were Frenchmen," Mme Costellot admitted, "but they had sold themselves to the English." "Exactly," cried the Count, "those traitors were collaborators! There is nothing new under the sun!" Suddenly, he brightened up; the mention of Joan of Arc had reminded him of a "good one." This was a cartoon that had appeared in a paper before 1939; a debonair Göring was shown standing before the microphone, announcing to his dear French listeners that Joan of Arc was about to address them, and Joan-Hitler, with long Germanic tresses and a little mustache, was saying with a smirk: "*Gentils François, sus aux Anglois!*" M. de Balansun laughed loudly. M. Lardenne smiled indulgently. Mme Costellot shrugged her shoulders and said, "Jewish propaganda!"

Before 1939, Mme Costellot had suffered from intermittent Anglophobia as other people suffer from malaria, with long pauses of comparative immunity. The virus had entered into her system during a stay in Biarritz, when the then young Mme Costellot, who was very anxious to get into the best social set of the Côte, had been ostracized in a polite, but icy manner by several English families. The manner in which these people had kept her at a distance—her, Mme Costellot, the descendant of an ancient bourgeois family of the district—had been all the more

insulting because it had not been accompanied by any personal manifestation of dislike. They had simply ignored her. They had passed her by as though she did not exist. Yet these same London snobs had taken in their circle a friend of Mme Costellot's, who had married an Englishman and spoke the language fluently. This had inflicted a wound to Mme Costellot's pride, and through this wound the virus of Anglophobia had insinuated itself into her blood. The incubation of the virus had been slow, but sure. Suddenly, after June, 1940, the disease spread like a tropical flower and took on alarming proportions. The malaria became chronic. Mme Costellot cherished her malady. She cultivated it. With the help of the newspapers of the time, she reinforced it by a quartan ague of anti-Semitism and anti-Freemasonry. Like a candidate for Davos devouring the popular literature on tuberculosis, Mme Costellot devoured all the anti-British literature she could lay hands on. Maurras, Béraud, Drummond, Bainville, not counting the weekly articles in *Je suis partout*—it was all grist to her mill. Little by little, Mme Costellot elaborated a philosophy of history, which, in its fine simplicity, could be compared to Bossuet's views on the question. She believed that since the dawn of the Christian era, the misfortunes of the Western world could be explained by the activities—at first independent, later, in the course of the centuries, combined—of Semitic and Anglo-Saxon covetousness. Under the penetrating scrutiny of Mme Costellot, the century assumed its true, apocalyptic colors. The Beast was crouching in London, at the heart of the city, and stretching out its tentacles to Wall Street and—lugubrious farce!—to the Kremlin. The Beast was Saxon—Jewish—and Tartar. Frenziedly, Mme Costellot began to set up striking analogies: the conscious and active anti-Semitism of the French kings; the imposition of the yellow star on the Jews under the reign of Saint Louis; yet Albion given over since time immemorial to the circumcised. A chain of irrefutable evidence to Anglo-Judaeo-Muscovite collusion. A chorus of detestable names sounded simultaneously in Mme Costellot's ears: Disraeli, Marx, Süß, Morgenthau, Hore-Belisha, Bela Kun. Since 1940, she had led a fierce anti-English campaign in Saint-Clar society. Her arguments were insidious or massive in turn, abstract or emotional, and she renewed her stock from week to week in the pages of *Je suis partout*. Animated by heroic ardor to fight the good fight, she would even tackle inoffensive workmen of Saint-Clar, former Communists, in the streets or on the market place. She had no great difficulty in convincing some of them that Judaeo-Saxon capitalism was at the root of all their misfortunes. Nevertheless,

they refused to follow her into the pro-German camp, and this unjustifiable contradiction enraged her. In the course of her trips to Bordeaux or Paris, she would find on the walls of toilets in the train, the hotel, or the café, certain vituperative inscriptions dictated by the political consciences of Frenchmen who had not hesitated to engrave them in these secluded places for the edification of an anonymous public. Then Mme Costellot, the enlightened bourgeoisie, would snatch a pencil out of her handbag and set down incisive aphorisms like: "Down with England!" "Death to the Jews!" "War was declared by the city of London!"—and sometimes even an exposé of several lines on the enslavement of France by England between 1920 and 1940. In this manner the spirit of conquest and the desire to defend human honor always imbued Mme Costellot, no matter where she might be. These evidences of her written propaganda appeared between various obscene drawings that had been perpetrated by facetious persons, devoid of a political conscience. Mme Costellot did not perceive these drawings; in that respect, she resembled the Sisters of Charity at St-Lazare or La Petite Roquette, who were wont to close their eyes in a voluntary and sublime manner to the moral turpitude of the prisoners in their charge.

Mme Costellot called her ruling passion "self-defense," and blamed the inhabitants of Saint-Clar bitterly because their conservative instincts were so perverted that they no longer put up the slightest resistance to the criminal provocations of the B.B.C.

From June, 1940, on, her attitude toward the Germans was most dignified. In the presence of von Brackner, the lodger who had been forced on the Lardennes, she manifested a noble patriotic attitude. When that officer mentioned the love he bore to France and his long-standing wish to visit "your beautiful country," Mme Costellot rose to her feet, quivering with emotion, came toward him and, laying a finger on the engraved dagger he wore in his belt, exclaimed, "We would have welcomed you, von Brackner, but as a tourist—without the weapon you have here!" Von Brackner bowed with a smile and pronounced a fine eulogy on the patriotism of this "noble Frenchwoman." This episode assumed in the Lardenne family circle the edifying character of those pages set for children at primary schools as "*Lectures expliquées*," such as the famous "*Dernière classe*" in the *Contes du Lundi*. They often reminded each other of "Marguerite's answer to von Brackner." This answer had made the rounds of all the salons of Saint-Clar. M. de Balansun had commented on it with enthusiasm.

Later on, and especially after Montoire, Mme Costellot's sympathies

assumed an increasingly active character. She suffered von Brackner to pay her discreet attentions. This was her revenge for the humiliations she had suffered at British hands in Biarritz. After all, the offenders of Biarritz were only city shopkeepers, while von Brackner, a personal friend of the Crown Prince, belonged to one of the oldest nobility of Europe and could trace his descent right back to the Emperor Otto.

Mme Delahaye, since her recent conversion to the Resistance movement, felt very embarrassed about the problem of the Germans. She was far too idealistic to harbor a fanatical hatred for anything, be it an individual or a nation. This amiable agnostic, reared in the school of thought of Romain Rolland, Rabindranath Tagore, and the great Occultists, could not believe that the human race might contain ethnical groups who were irremediably guilty and doomed beforehand to the flames of the Holy Inquisitions of the day. She trusted in Man. Besides, she was of a dreamy nature. When a German officer called on her with a formal order of requisition for living quarters, Mme Delahaye, who was both shortsighted and absent-minded, began by calling him "*Monsieur le Gendarme*," as she first took him for a member of the local police force. When Berthe, half fainting with terror, had undeceived her, she excused herself and asked "*Monsieur l'officier Allemand*" to take a seat. The stranger began to converse politely with the pretty snowy-haired old lady. And Mme Delahaye, far from retiring into hostile and arrogant silence—she was much too well brought up for that—answered with affability, as she would have answered anyone be he a minister, an apache, or a Negro. Friedrich Rustiger was a musician. He shared with his hostess a predilection for Mozart and Bach. Mme Delahaye was delighted and began to tell him about her deceased husband. "But I know his works!" exclaimed Rustiger. Before the war, he had heard the Symphony *In Exitu* in Paris. He commented on it with great delicacy. Overwhelmed by emotion, Mme Delahaye immediately invited him to listen to a record and declared that she would be happy to put her entire collection of records at his disposal. Friedrich Rustiger kissed her hand reverently. Cécile felt as though she were living an unpublished chapter of *Jean Christophe*.

M. de Balansun blamed the "little girl" severely for her complacency toward a Teuton. In November, 1942, after the Mohican's visit, he implored her to break off all relations with Friedrich. But Mme Delahaye had not the heart to comply with these exigencies of a Jacobin severity. Lieutenant Rustiger was a man of the world, gentle and intelligent. Mme Delahaye talked to him exclusively of music, concerts, conductors,

the Salzburg festival, and "the admirable cadence of Kreisler in the Concerto in D." Neither of them had the slightest difficulty in avoiding painful allusions to actual events, as they were both equally anxious to escape the depressing reality in which they lived. One day, however, Rustiger, in the course of conversation, made a brief, but ironical allusion to the taste of "our Führer," who liked the vulgar blare of *Die Meistersinger*. Mme Delahaye triumphantly repeated it to M. de Balansun. The latter was mollified. He agreed that Rustiger was a Teuton of the good sort, a spiritual son of Goethe, who had strayed by misadventure among the barbarian hordes of the Third Reich.

Deeply distressed to see Mme Costellot and Léon at grips with each other, M. Lardenne, who was conciliatory and tactful, introduced the name of Lieutenant Rustiger into the conversation—as he might have thrown a frail bridge over a chasm, hoping the two adversaries would meet on it. He knew that M. de Balansun desisted from his Germanophobia in the case of Cécile's lodger. The Count declared that this civilized German was a European of the eighteenth century, and that he would gladly hold out his hand to him, if he were not afraid of scandalizing the backward and loutish population of Saint-Clar by this gesture.

"Do you really imagine that the inhabitants of Saint-Clar are so backward?" exclaimed Mme Costellot. "Look around you, my poor friend, and name one of them who has not at some time spoken to a German! Why, the Germans are a blessing to Saint-Clar. The tradespeople exploit them for all they are worth. The peasants welcome them with open arms, while they would shut the door in your face, Balansun, if you came to beg for six eggs. The shopgirls run after them. The schoolboys take free German lessons from them. The men joke with them in the cafés. In a word, the whole of Saint-Clar is out to make much of the occupants. And those who profess to hate them admire them secretly."

"Marguerite, you exaggerate," protested M. de Balansun. "You are blinded by your partisanship."

"My partisanship indeed! I'm not saying that the people of Saint-Clar like the Germans. I am saying that they accept them, out of calculation, self-interest, or simple inertia. And deep down they realize, more or less dimly, that everything they had been told about the Boches was a lot of nonsense. They thought they would be ill-treated by a savage soldiery using cudgels, and what do they find? Men like themselves, neither

better nor worse. And correct, one could not be more so. So I promise you that you can shake hands with any German you like, and nobody in Saint-Clar will look askance at you."

"My dignity would not permit me to do so, in any case," retorted the Count, in an icy tone.

"Your dignity!" scoffed Mme Costellot, looking daggers at him. "Dignity, my dear Balansun, would have been called for in 1940, on the Western Front, when the Germans were advancing. Today it is a bit too late."

This was the argument Mme Costellot used against every male who seemed to balk at the occupation. In May, 1940, M. de Balansun, Major in the Reserves, had lost his battalion as a man loses his spectacles, in the general chaos of the exodus. He had found himself one fine morning at Carpentras, in the midst of a general staff of sexagenarian officers, each of them accompanied by his "typist," all of them bewildered, trembling, and furious with Gamelin. In the meanwhile, whole regiments of their troops had been taken prisoner between the Meuse and the Escaut. The Count did not relish being reminded of this inglorious period of his military career. Mme Costellot's brutal attack left him speechless, but M. Lardenne came to the rescue.

"My dear Marguerite," he said, "no one can doubt that our friend Léon did his duty during the tragic weeks preceding the armistice; our best men were overtaken by the events, and it would be unjust to blame them for a defeat which was entirely due to the leaders, and which, to tell the truth, was prepared even before the start of hostilities."

"You may be right," Mme Costellot conceded. "But I object to this talk of dignity now."

"Let us say, to settle this futile debate, which seems to distress our dear Cécile very much, let us say that you two, Léon and you, have a different conception of dignity. Each of you, in your own way, is a good French patriot. Therefore you should stand together in the misfortunes that have come over our poor country, instead of being divided by questions of terminology in which I, for one, can see nothing but pedantry."

M. de Balansun was very fond of his old friend Lardenne; he admired him as a man of great culture, a true Epicurean, a kind of Anatole France, more sensitive and more genial. Besides, he was incapable of bearing malice. So he stretched out his hand to Mme Costellot with blustering joviality.

"Victor is right," he cried. "Let us bury the hatchet, Marguerite. We

have no right to trouble the serenity of this intimate little gathering by our vain disagreements. It is enough for us to know that our mutual respect has not suffered."

Mme Costellot, like a good sport, pressed the outstretched hand.

"But, of course," she said, with a cunning little laugh, "of course we respect each other, Balansun."

She called him "Balansun," as Shakespeare's kings call each other Bohemia, Denmark, or Norway.

M. Lardenne settled himself in his easy chair, took a sip of tea and sighed with relief.

"This tea is delicious," he murmured. "And the toast is so good, dear Cécile. Let us thank Heaven that we are still permitted to enjoy the calm pleasures of the tea table. Alas, my dear Léon, I fear that I am entirely devoid of dignity." His voice became even more flutelike and fragile. "I am only an almost crippled old man, who has nothing left but the childish delights of gluttony. That is my way of fiddling while Rome burns."

He raised his plump hand and let it fall back again on the arm of his chair with a gesture of gentle resignation.

"Fiddling while Stalingrad burns," he repeated, with a bitter little smile.

"One day soon it will perhaps be our turn, my friends, to burn on the apocalyptical pyre. And our executioners will not make pedantic distinctions between the nuances of our respective dignity. And so? And so let us enjoy our delicious toast with honey."

"Did you notice how I shut him up?" Mme Costellot was saying to M. Lardenne an hour later when they had taken leave of Cécile. "Did you notice? The hero of 1940 who was going to insinuate that I lacked dignity!"

Now that M. Lardenne was alone with Jacques' mother, he was rather less urbane than he liked to appear in society.

"Our poor Balansun has never been conspicuous for his intelligence," he snapped. "It is a waste of time to argue with him. I have given that up long ago."

"I know he's an old idiot," said Mme Costellot, who was in the habit of bestowing certificates of imbecility or intelligence with calm assurance. In that respect she resembled eighty per cent of the French people. France is probably the only country in the world where one gets the impression that every citizen has been commissioned by the Almighty to pronounce an infallible verdict on the mental capacities of his equals.

"I know he's an old idiot," she repeated, "but that does not give him the right to insult me."

M. Lardenne walked along slowly and carefully, leaning against Marguerite's arm. His asthmatic breathing scanned the rhythm of his steps.

"The spectacle of these bourgeois relentlessly set on their own ruin would be comic if it were less depressing," he said. "Léon does not see that if, by bad luck, the Allies were to win the war, it would be the end of all of us. There are ruffians enough in Saint-Clar to burn down our houses and hang us on the butchers' hooks, as they did in Spain."

Mme Costellot could feel him shivering beside her.

"If that has to happen," he continued in a stifled voice, "I hope God will allow me to die first. God preserve me from being the witness and the victim of the triumph of the red rabble."

He uttered the last words with an expression of senile hatred.

"They will not triumph, Victor," declared Mme Costellot fiercely. "The Germans possess an enormous arsenal of secret weapons. They will use them when the time comes. Did you read in the papers about their latest tank, the Tiger?"

M. Lardenne knew nothing about the Tiger, and Marguerite described it to him in a technical manner.

"I wonder," said M. Lardenne, a few minutes later, "why Léon has changed his opinions so ostensibly. In 1941, he was loyal to the Marshal."

"I can guess why," said Mme Costellot. "Francis has turned his ideas topsy-turvy. That young Francis is an inveterate Gaullist, both out of stupidity and out of interest. Just imagine, he gets all sorts of people across the line, escaped prisoners, Jews, Communists and other scoundrels. It pays him well. Oh, it pays to be a Gaullist. Besides, it's romantic—the secrecy, the adventure, a little risk. I always suspected him of being a queer customer, that young Francis, beneath his choirboy exterior. He's turned Balansun's head topsy-turvy, believe me. Little beast! Ah, if one weren't kindly and charitable—"

She did not finish the sentence.

"What do you mean, Marguerite?"

Mme Costellot assumed a slightly sinister expression.

"Nothing. I only want to say that there are certain young Frenchmen who deserve a good lesson, from time to time."

M. Lardenne raised his hand to his brow and closed his eyes for a few seconds.

"Marguerite," he murmured, "there are days when you frighten me a little."

"Set your mind at rest, Victor," she muttered. "Nothing will happen. Nothing."

"My God!" said M. Lardenne, "why do we have to live in these frightful times? All the decencies that made life possible are falling to pieces. The world is a vast prison cell, without hope. All my life I have worked like a slave I have earned the right to a rest now, to enjoy the modest pleasures of my declining age. I find a hysterical world that, amid wild howls, tramples underfoot all the gracious things that still existed on earth. . . ." He sighed. "Well, my wife belongs to the saintly cohorts of militant Christianity. Let us have faith in the Communion of Saints: I will probably be allowed to enjoy eternal felicity."

As M. de Balansun was passing in front of the *Café du Commerce*, he caught sight of Justin Darricade going in, and rushed after him.

"I am delighted to meet you, Monsieur Darricade," he exclaimed gaily.

The Engineer of Public Works knew the Count, who was one of his bridge partners at the club. He considered him an inoffensive old gentleman, but avoided being seen with him in public. Darricade nursed certain postwar political ambitions, far-flung ambitions reaching beyond the local scene. Now, De Balansun was considered in Saint-Clar as a reactionary, at the best a Republican of the Right. Besides, he was counted as a member of the bourgeois caste, even though his income was a modest one. (As a solicitor, M. de Balansun inspired his fellow citizens with a wholesome respect, founded on a fairly exact appreciation of his competence and his business sense.) For these reasons, even though at the bottom of his heart he shared the Count's political opinions—going even further than the latter in the direction of "reactionary ideas"—Darricade evinced a creditable flair by considering that M. de Balansun was a compromising associate for the present. The course was not set toward "reaction" at Saint-Clar, nor, in a general way, in France. It seemed rather to be influenced by the wind blowing from the Russian steppes. Darricade, who was a realist, realized that this would not last long: fortunately, it also blew from the vast American prairies. It was to be foreseen that after the victory of the Allies, there would be a period, more or less lengthy, during which all candidates for the legislature must shelve the moderate ideas of a Republican of the Right

and evince their ardent sympathies with "our Communist brothers," for instance. Consequently, M. de Balansun was not a person to seek out at the present moment. Darricade greeted him coolly, but the Count was unaware of it.

"You must give me the pleasure of taking an *apéritif* with me, my dear friend," he said.

Darricade wanted to refuse, but the old gentleman was so insistent that he had to sit down beside him on the same bench.

"For days I have been waiting for an opportunity to have a heart-to-heart talk with you," the Count said, in a confidential tone. His rubicund face beamed with gentle roguishness, his eyes were sparkling. Darricade felt slightly uneasy, wondering what the old fool might be getting at. A heart-to-heart talk? They had nothing in particular to discuss.

"I am sure you can guess what I am hinting at," continued the Count, lowering his voice.

"I am sorry," said Darricade, "but I haven't an idea."

M. de Balansun turned round and made sure that nobody was listening. The *café* was empty. Seizing Darricade's hand, he pressed it forcefully.

"I know everything!" he breathed.

Darricade, much disturbed, made as though to rise.

"You need fear nothing," M. de Balansun said, holding him back. "I am fully aware of the necessity of absolute discretion in these matters. You have nothing to fear, my dear friend, I am as silent as the grave."

Darricade looked more and more bewildered.

"What—what are you talking about?" he stuttered.

"I am so happy, my friend," said M. de Balansun, pressing his interlocutor's hand again. "I am so happy to have the opportunity of expressing my sympathy and assuring you of my complete devotion."

"Once again, I do not understand—"

The lawyer winked at him.

"I know, I know, secrecy, discretion! But you can have confidence in me, Darricade. For my heart has been won for the cause of resistance. And I place myself entirely at your disposal!"

The Engineer of Public Works threw a panic-stricken glance around the *café*. He made a sign to the Count to be silent.

"My son has told me everything," M. de Balansun went on in a low,

voluble voice. "I know that you are one of the regional chiefs of the clandestine army and that France will owe it to men like you when she regains her liberty."

Darricade seemed torn between fear, annoyance, and amusement. When he realized that the *café* was empty and nobody could overhear their conversation, his fear dispersed. A gentle hilarity made his shoulders quiver. But M. de Balansun took this sudden outbreak of mirth for a slightly disconcerting, but perfectly legitimate manifestation of patriotic emotion, and remained unabashed.

"As for myself, I am prepared, dear friend, to offer you all that is left to me of force, aptitude, and passion!" he announced in the tone in which Bossuet must have pronounced his famous peroration on the "vestiges of a voice that fails and of an ardor that is spent."

Another outbreak of restrained hilarity made Darricade bend over the table. At last he regained his composure and wiped his eyes.

"Well, M. de Balansun," he said, "I am happy to be able to count on you. I know your son. A friend from Bordeaux had pointed him out to me as reliable." He frowned. "Reliable, reliable, I'm not so sure, after all. I would have thought he would be able to keep a secret. If he is not, it's rather serious."

"Do not blame Francis!" M. de Balansun entreated him, pathetically. "I'll answer for him. It was I who discovered everything. It was I who dragged these confessions from him by showing him that I was not to be duped. I had actually guessed the reason of his frequent and mysterious absences."

"Well," said Justin Darricade, "in that case it is now up to you to keep the secret. Do you know where your loquacity can lead you, yourself and Francis? Do you know to what you are exposing yourself? To the stake!"

"I am a grave, a catacomb, a necropolis!" the Count declared, grandiloquently.

And, to prove his faculties of dissimulation in a striking manner, he clapped his hands and called the waiter; then, turning to Darricade as though he were continuing an interrupted conversation, he shouted,

"My dear fellow, he had three aces! Of course, he took the trick. I could not believe my eyes."

Darricade was going into his house when he saw Mme Arréguy coming from the opposite direction. They met in front of the brass plate on his door.

"Come in quickly," said Darricade, pushing her into the passage.

Before he closed the front door, he had a look round to make sure there was nobody on the street.

Mme Arréguy was, as usual, wearing her sumptuous furs.

"When did you get back from Paris?" asked Justin.

"Yesterday evening. You might give us a kiss."

"But, of course, my pet," he said good-humoredly, and pressed her against him. "Are you staying tonight?"

"No, what an idea! The old jackass is waiting for me. Sunday afternoon, if you are free."

He took her into the room. She threw off her hat and coat and sat down on the bed.

"Well, was your journey successful?"

"Not bad. Eliane gave me a good time, but I told her off, and how."

"Why?"

"She let Philippe go. The young gangster isn't staying with her any more. He doesn't even go to college. And you can be sure I let him have it!"

"How is he making out?"

"He seems to be getting on all right. If you could see how smart he looks! He tells me he sells watches and things like that. The Boches are crazy about watches, it seems."

"I see. He works on the black market. That's not a profession."

"That's what I told him. But the son-of-a-bitch won't hear of going back to college. What are you laughing at?"

"Your calling him a son-of-a-bitch. Your son. It's funny."

She began to laugh too.

"Oh, by the way, speaking of bitches. I know a good one. But you won't let it go any further, will you? You'll never guess who he's now got for his mistress, Philippe!"

"Really, does your son talk to you about his mistresses?"

"Why not? I'm his pal. He calls me his little pal of a ma. Why shouldn't he talk to me about his mistresses? . . . Now, have a guess who the latest one is. It's a scream, I tell you."

"How the devil should I know. Is it a tart from here?"

"Not a tart, my dear," Mme Arréguy protested with dignity, "on the contrary, a girl from the very best background. She is from Saint-Clar, yes."

"From Saint-Clar? I can't imagine . . ."

"I'll bet you a thousand to one you can't. The Balansun girl!"

Darricade remained speechless with amazement.

"What, you didn't expect that!" said Mme Arréguy.

He burst out laughing. "What a family!" he exclaimed. "They are amazing, simply amazing!"

"And," said Mme Arréguy, "who'd have thought it? That old-maidish creature, with her stringy hair. I can see her still, in her navy-blue skirt and round felt hat, taking the girl scouts to the country. A walking refrigerator. She could have slept in a room full of Zouaves and not one of them would have even dared look at her."

"But how the devil did she happen to stoop to play around with your kid?"

"Stoop? What the hell do you mean? My son is worthy of her, isn't he? My son is worthy of a princess."

"He's much younger than she is."

"And what's the difference? He's a fine love beast, is my Philippe." Darricade seemed almost shocked.

"You use expressions—"

"Well, isn't it true?"

"I don't know, honey. It's with the mother that I go to bed. If the son is like his mother, I agree. . . ."

Mme Arréguy turned her head away with a show of modesty. Darricade went to sit beside her on the bed and slipped his arm round her waist.

"Aren't you jealous of the Balansun girl?" he asked, slyly.

Mme Arréguy pushed him away brusquely.

"Jealous?" she repeated. Her voice faltered very slightly. "Jealous? Why should I be jealous?"

"I don't know, I'm sure," said Darricade, lowering his eyes. He smiled a peculiar smile. "Just an impression I had. These things can happen, you know."

Mme Arréguy stared at him for a few seconds in silence. In her eyes there was an expression of anguish and disgust. Then she said, almost in a whisper, "You swine!"

A Sunday in April, 1943

A little square of blue sky could be seen through the window, above the courtyard, if one lifted one's head. It was Sunday on a sunny April day. Outside people were probably taking their afternoon walk, either in pairs or whole families together, still wrapped up in their winter

coats and wearing on their faces the bleak expression of Sunday walkers. Gérard occupied the only easy chair in the room. Hélène, sitting on a stool with her legs crossed, was smoking a cigarette. Gérard had been talking for several minutes.

"I have seen him several times this month," he was saying. "He is really a good man. Back in 1940, I was already impressed by his calm, his levelheadedness on every occasion and above all by his simplicity. I assure you that he stood out among all those young cadets, who were all so conceited and so second rate." He blushed, and amended, "Of course, some of them were nice. There are always exceptions."

Hélène smiled.

"Don't try to correct yourself, old fellow. When you make a boner it's much better to pass on rapidly. But you did not make a boner. It is an understood thing between us that Jean is a brilliant exception among young officers. Neither conceited nor mediocre. Well, go on with your story."

Gérard fidgeted with the ends of his tie.

"By the way, still no news from Jean?"

"No. Still no news, for a change. But that's absolutely unimportant now."

He raised his head.

"What do you mean by 'now'?"

"It just doesn't matter any more. Don't try to understand. You will never succeed."

"It might be plain enough, Hélène. But I cannot believe . . ."

"Don't believe anything, Gérard. I simply meant that now I have grown used to having no news. That is all. And now go on with your little story. It fascinates me."

He looked at her in a puzzled way. She was strange. He had not seen her for three months and he was struck by the curious change that he found in her. It was a change he could not quite define. It seemed to him that she looked older. And yet her face retained its touching beauty, heightened by discreet make-up. The lines of her body were still harmonious, but there was perhaps something more supple about it, more abandoned and more languid. It was not a question of aging or fading, but rather—he searched for the exact definition—of maturing and unfolding. She had become more womanly, in a way. It must be her age; after all, she is nearly twenty-eight, he told himself. Hélène's gestures had lost their brusqueness. Even her voice was deeper and no longer had those acid intonations that had appealed so strongly to

Gérard. A new assurance, a kind of calm self-confidence emanated from her person. Yet at the same time, and it was this strange contrast that disconcerted Gérard, her young girl's words, her attitude, even the expression of her eyes revealed a harsh, dry quality that had formerly only manifested itself occasionally and fleetingly. One might have thought that Hélène was on the defensive all the time. Gérard could not understand it. She must have suffered a great deal lately, he thought to himself. The lack of news from Jean, the waiting, the loneliness. But that was just why he had come: to help her, to take her out of herself, to encourage her to live a less sterile life.

"Well, I saw him several times," he continued. "But it was only yesterday that he told me about his activities. We had been talking for a long time. I had told him about—well, about the subject of the letter I wrote to you in January. My moral confusion. Forgive me, it sounds like bathos; it is easier to write about it than to talk about it. I told him—of the impression of absolute usefulness, of wretchedness, and of insignificance that my life gave me. The empty days, one after the other. I told him that after 1940 I had thought to find in the will to regenerate the country—a kind of moral certainty, a stimulus for thought and action."

The embarrassment with which he expressed himself was almost painful. Hélène did not take her eyes off him. She allowed him to get entangled, to stumble over his words, and to struggle confusedly in his "bathos." She went on smoking, unmoved.

"I even admitted to him that I collaborated on certain papers. This shows you [his face was contorted by a bitter smile] that I went pretty far in my—attack of sincerity. He listened to me very attentively."

It was true, Pierre had listened to him very attentively. He had sat at the other side of the table, his chin in his hands; he had a fine peasant's head, intelligent and sensitive. Then he had begun to speak. He had told Gérard that his "case"—he had pronounced the word with a smile, as though excusing himself—was a common one among young men of their generation, the generation of those who reached twenty-five by the time of the Armistice. Many of them had been equally confused. For some, the problem had been resolved in a brutal yet a provisional manner—they were prisoners of war in Germany or had been deported and enrolled in labor organizations. For them, the problem of the moment was primitive and vital: to hold out and survive. Those who were lucky enough to be free—if the word had any meaning in present-day France—found themselves defenseless in a world for

which their education had not prepared them. They were torn between the temptation of immediate enjoyment, easy gain, shady though semi-official speculations, or worse, of amateur gangsterism—or, on the other hand, an honest and lifeless resignation, sinking to a meaningless daily grind. Some of them adopted an attitude of cynical despair and thought only of enjoying life and earning money. Most of them sank to a spiritless existence and excused or justified themselves with feeble sophisms, such as simple expediency, disinterest, or even artistic creativeness; in a word, by all the hoary slogans of the time *entre deux guerres*—just so many excuses to keep them from committing themselves. Finally, there were those who followed with more or less enthusiasm, more or less clear-sightedness, and more or less faith the Franco-German program of the New Order, Vichy, and Fascism. Many followers of the new order were fools, many were plain scoundrels, but some were perfectly sincere men who were not devoid of intelligence. Infrequently, they were adventurers in a big way; French Fascism boasted some romantic figures. It would be wrong to condemn all the adherents of Vichy *in toto*. A few of them, among the best, were only guilty of having erred in their choice. And anyone can make a mistake sometime or another.

Pierre had said these things, calmly, impartially, unemotionally. Gérard seemed to understand everything more clearly, as he listened to him. Then Pierre had added that for young men with certain moral standards, there can be no true equilibrium, actually no true happiness, except in a clear-sighted activity directed toward a positive aim, an aim that reaches out beyond the individual and demands the utmost of him. This aim need not be metaphysical; it is enough to strive for it, forgetting personal ambitions, and to be willing to make sacrifices.

"He's just a preacher, your friend," Hélène interrupted. "I've heard that kind of sermon before. I seem to remember, even, my poor Gérard, having talked like that myself at times. Notably, the creed of the Girl Scouts contains some passages of similar sacred eloquence. Oh! it was quite beautiful, the creed of the Girl Scouts."

She lit a cigarette from the butt of the one she had been smoking and fixed a cold and ironical look on the young man.

"No, you see, I don't quite know what you are trying to get at," she continued, "and today I'm in no mood to listen to dreary introspections."

"Forgive me," said Gérard, "I had no intention of boring you." He smiled rather sadly. "It's a sad fact, Hélène, that every time I talk

something over with you, it no longer interests you. It's inopportune, unseasonable. Every time I've wanted to tell you something important, something that meant a lot to me and that I thought would interest you, I chose the wrong hour, the wrong moment. I never hit on the right time. The atmosphere was wrong, or your mood was not in harmony with mine. In our friendship, we seem to be continually getting out of step and then trying painfully to readjust it again. I am like an amateur photographer who works with an ancient camera, and can't manage to get a clear, precise image. Everything I take is out of focus."

He looked at his watch.

"Well, it can't be helped. We'd do better to go out. I suggest a good walk in the Bois, a good dinner, and then a movie or a play. Have you seen *La Reine Morte*?"

"No. But I don't feel like going out, Gérard. I am rather tired. Besides, you must finish your story. I am curious to know what you were getting at."

"It's not worth while, now."

"Oh, don't be cross! When you arrived you were full of enthusiasm, you told me that by chance you had met a former army friend, a wonderful fellow who held forth to you magnificently about the sacrificed generation, the problems of our time, the bewilderment of our male youth, indifference and heroism, black marketeering, and self-sacrifice. I want to know the sequel. It's terrific! Above all, I want to know the end of the story."

Gérard got up. He looked at her with sorrow. But he was also experiencing, darkly and timidly, another feeling for which he could not have found a name, a feeling simultaneously agreeable and painful. "I think I am beginning to cut myself loose from her," he thought. And yet she was beautiful tonight, beautiful and desirable.

"I promise you that it isn't worth it," he said. "Actually, when I come to think of it, I haven't any patience with this kind of talk myself."

"Oh, yes, you have, and how!" she exclaimed ironically.

She forced the young man back into his chair, pressing both her hands on his shoulders. She looked at him sitting there, awkward, ungainly, with his long, rather unattractive face. He was slightly ridiculous. "I believe I have no affection left for him," she thought.

"I am listening, Gérard."

"There's no sense going on. But if you insist. I'll be as brief as possible. Here it is: Pierre proposed that I should work with him. The work would be transmitting messages, and circulating tracts. I had no

idea such things were going on. I have never even seen one of these tracts. I have heard, like everybody else, of fellows who fled into the *maquis* to avoid the S.T.O. But I never dreamed that there existed the systematic and thorough organization Pierre told me about. He works in it and he proposed that I should help him. That's all."

"And then you accepted, I hope, seeing you are thirsting for heroism?"

She was smoking her cigarette, her legs crossed above the knees in a nonchalant and abandoned attitude. The obscure feeling he had experienced was becoming more definite; perhaps it was contempt.

"No, I did not accept," he said.

"But why? I can just picture you editing tracts at night, in a garret, straining your ears whenever a board creaks. A charming romantic lithograph—Lorenzaccio of the twentieth century. Really, considering that you go in for literature, you ought to have accepted. Tracts—I saw one the other day. It was written with a mixture of vitriol and tricolor ink. *Déroulède* and Paul-Louis Courier. If you were to transpose those flights of rhetoric you wrote for *La Gerbe* into the register of 'dissidence,' you could turn out something very good. Why didn't you accept?"

"Because I lack faith. And now I will leave you, *Hélène*. You are insulting me in a most sprightly manner, but all the same, it's a bit painful. I haven't much more to say to you. As a matter of fact, I have nothing more to say to you."

"Just a minute. First, I wasn't insulting you. I was joking—rather clumsily, I admit. But you didn't tell me everything. The essential part is missing. Why did you come to see me to tell me all that? For what purpose? What did you want to suggest to me?"

"Nothing. I just wanted to see you, that's all."

"Don't lie to me, *Gérard*. You're a rotten liar. Come on; what was the great idea behind it all?"

"Why do you want me to tell you? I think you can guess."

"I thought so! I bet you were going to suggest that I should join the organization?" she cried, her eyes sparkling. "That's what it was, isn't it?"

"Yes. And what is more, I came with the hope of being encouraged to join it myself. I lack faith. But if you had agreed to work with Pierre, I would have done anything in the world. Even without believing in it. In order to justify myself, do you understand? To justify myself—in my own eyes, above all, and in yours. In order to wipe out the words

you said last November, I needed your esteem as a man who is choking needs air."

He had said this in one breath. Now he went toward the window and raised his head. The square of blue sky up there was growing darker. Dusk was falling. Gérard no longer saw Hélène, who was sitting on the stool behind him. He no longer saw the expression of her face. A heavy silence fell between them, like something crushing and opaque.

"It's quite senseless, now," Gérard muttered without moving from the window. "Once again, we have fallen out of step. If I had suggested it to you at our last meeting—but you are far away today. You have changed in a curious way. I can understand the reasons, and yet they do not seem to me to justify such a change. I give up trying to understand you. And I don't believe that I will ever find you again."

As she did not answer, he turned round and looked at her. She was sitting on the stool, leaning right back against the bed. Her arm hung down by her side and her hand lay inertly on the floor. The cigarette, which was burning down, still hung between her fingers. Against the dark-red bedspread, her face appeared rather pale and her eyes were closed; her painted mouth was slightly open, it looked like a wound.

He made a step toward her.

"Hélène—"

She sat up and opened her eyes. There was a look of savage determination in her shining eyes. She smiled. Gérard had been about to stretch out his hand to her—now he let it fall. What was the use?

"Thank you for having come, anyway," she said.

"Have you definitely decided not to go out?" he asked, after a moment's hesitation. He was still trying to hang on, although he knew that there was nothing more he could do. "We would still have time to go to a play."

She shook her head, still smiling.

"Thank you, Gérard. Another time. Not tonight."

"Perhaps there won't be another time," he blurted out. He dropped his eyes. He felt darkly that he was losing her. He would have liked to spend one more evening with her, to feel her beside him, to see her happy, and to find again in her the young girl of his youth—the Hélène he had always known, the amazon. It was both stupid and painful to come up against her silence, her coldness, and her sarcasm. He wanted to cry out, "Drop that mask! Become once again the girl I love! Give me back Hélène." He had the impression that ten years of his life were

going by, that a part of himself was dying in that room, as the failing light died outside.

"Why shouldn't there be another time?" H       asked. "You'll come back, G      . Oh, I'm sure of it, you'll come back."

She lit a cigarette with an almost masculine gesture. She was sitting at his feet, the cigarette between her lips, her eyes squinting at the match; its flame threw a gleam on to her painted cheeks. "There's something of a whore about her now," he said to himself. Suddenly, he felt sick.

"Good night, H      ."

He held out his hand, and she shook it indifferently.

"Good night," she said, still smiling.

He opened the door on to the passage. She followed his tall, thin, slightly odd silhouette with her eyes—his shoulder blades stuck out under the cloth of his overcoat. At the door, he hesitated a moment and turned round. She was struck by the strange expression on his face. It was an expression she had never seen in him, unctuous and rather malicious. He pretended to be examining his nails, as he said slowly, "Besides, you know, all this is quite unimportant. My stories about Pierre, and all the rest of it. They don't mean a thing. Because your esteem—you see, I shall try to do without it from now on."

Tony and Philippe were lolling on a couch in M. Merkel's studio. At the other end of the room, Allouche was looking idly at a picture magazine, near the radio, which was quietly playing a jazz tune. It was a relaxed Sunday afternoon scene. M. Merkel, however, was far from idle. M. Merkel, wrapped in a thick frieze dressing gown, was sitting at a little mahogany writing desk, studying his files. He looked like a scholarly Benedictine monk. Tony and Philippe were talking softly about a recent "expedition" to the Massif Central. They had stayed a fortnight at Clermont-Ferrand. Two weeks of incident, colorful and heady, during which Philippe had shown great courage, level-headedness, and also virile ardor.

"By the way," said Tony, "doesn't your babe ask questions about what you do when you're away?"

"Of course, she does," said Philippe. "You can imagine, inquisitive as they are. But I've fixed that for good and all: officially, I travel for business. She believes I go away to deliver goods or to fetch them. A commercial traveler for the black market, see."

"Does she still preach at you?"

"No fear. She doesn't bother now."

"Do I understand you have a moralizing mistress, my dear Philippe?" asked M. Merkel, without lifting his nose from his files.

"Yes, boss," said Philippe, sniggering.

"They are the best," declared M. Merkel sententiously. "M. Barrès, if I remember rightly, has written some very fine pages on sermonizing mistresses. He believes that the pleasures of love are deeper and more poignant after half an hour of ethical considerations. I am prepared to agree with M. Barrès on this point, as well as on several others, especially the argument he develops with so much force and delicacy in *Le Secret Merveilleux*."

Philippe nudged the boy lolling beside him on the divan; once again the high priest was embarking on one of his half-serious, half-playful soliloquies, without seeking to ascertain whether the young acolytes were following what he was saying, whether they were even listening, although he feigned to be addressing them from time to time with the exquisite politeness that never failed him.

"Now we're in for it. He's off!" Philippe whispered to Tony.

They exchanged a mischievous glance like two naughty little choir-boys. Then, lying on their stomachs on the couch, they began to talk to each other in an undertone, while M. Merkel, still bending over his files, continued his solitary monologue.

"M. Barrès was manifestly gifted with a rare sensibility, an intelligence comparable to that of Ulysses and a faculty for contempt that could have taken him very far, if his nervous frailty had not forced him to cling, in spite of himself, to traditional conceptions, the inanity of which did not escape him. A spiritual pilgrimage that begins on the banks of the Orontes to end on those of the Moselle, rises to the cult of death and sinks to that of 'our dead'—what a heart-breaking failure! To begin with *Violante* and end with *Colette Baudouche*. To begin with the cup of 'ultima Thule' and end with the glass in which poor Alfred de Musset thought to contain 'your German Rhine.' But such is the sorry fate of most of our literary eagles: one fine day, they return to the eyrie of their youth, the national, religious, traditional eyrie. They are in a hurry to exchange the marvelous secret for the Légion d'Honneur or the bicorne of an academician. And, in the end, the proud eaglet who once spread his wings to the sun turns into a lamentable and rheumatically old cockatoo, who tries to believe in his own flummery. Poor M. Barrès! How small and ridiculous he seems next to a De Sade or

even a Lautréamont! My dear Philippe, I advise you never to read *Colette Baudouche*."

"What did you say, boss?" cried Philippe, from the sofa.

"I was giving you some judicious advice on literary discernment, my young friend. But, as a matter of fact, maybe you have never read M. Barrès?" asked M. Merkel, whose courtesy sometimes led him to ask purely rhetorical questions with the utmost gravity.

"I haven't, boss. I believe I heard about him at school. He was a guy who lived at the time of the war in '70, wasn't he?"

"A little later than that," corrected M. Merkel, mildly. "Although the disaster of Sedan would doubtless have inspired M. Barrès with some very droll pages for his nationalistic repertory, I owe it to chronological exactitude to rectify."

"What a hell of a bore he is," whispered Tony. "Let him shoot off his mouth. He doesn't give a good goddamn about us. Go on; how was she, your cookie, when you asked her to do that?"

Philippe whispered behind his hand. Tony listened with avid attention, stretching his small jackal's head far out of the open collar of his shirt.

"Well, what d'you know," he said, when Philippe had finished. "Hot stuff. A 'nice' girl too. And she never let out a peep?"

"Don't be a dope. You'd think she'd done it all her life."

"P'raps she'd done it before?"

"I'm sure she hasn't."

"Then she must be nuts."

"Hell, no. She's hot for me, that's all."

"Or else she's naturally that way."

"No, she's hot for me, I tell you. D'you want me to prove it? D'you want me to read you a letter?"

He got up and went to take a crumpled paper out of the inner pocket of his jacket.

"Now listen," he said, returning to sit beside Tony. "This is a letter I got two weeks ago, just before we went to Clermont."

He smoothed out the paper and began to read in an undertone:

"Philippe darling, how sweet you were last night! I must tell you so and thank you. You overwhelmed me with happiness, my little love. I haven't made the bed, so that it would keep the imprint of your body and the perfume of our night. I haven't had a bath today, so that my skin will keep the feel of your caresses. . . ."

"Haoua!" exclaimed Allouche, who reverted to pure Berber when he was excited. "She likes it, your little one! *Iemal Iemal* She's hot stuff, that one!"

"Listen to what comes now," said Philippe.

"Your big and beautiful hands, so innocent and yet so shameless. For the next ten days until you come back, I will live with the memory of your hands imprinted on my skin, like the brand of the red-hot iron on a slave. . . ."

"She writes well, you got to admit that," commented Tony, with the air of a connoisseur of the art of letter writing.

"She's educated," bragged Philippe. "College degree in physics and chemistry, if you please." He continued to read:

"Sometimes I have dreamed that your hands might one day press my throat hard, a little too hard, just hard enough to let me die. And I thought that it would be a wonderful death. I am crazy, and I love my madness. And I am writing all this for the pleasure of going to the extreme limits of my madness. It doesn't matter whether you understand or not. The only thing that matters to me is that you should come back. I kiss your sweet lips."

"That's what I said," exclaimed Tony. "She's nuts, completely nuts."

"*Inaaldin bebek!*" moaned Allouche. "Why did you have to read that? I didn't want to go to the whorehouse tonight!"

M. Merkel had listened to the reading.

"But you are mistaken, my dear Tony," he declared. "That young person is not 'nuts,' as you put it. On the contrary, her letter is interesting, extremely interesting. If I understand rightly, from what Philippe has already allowed us to gather concerning the personality of his mistress, we have here a very curious case of that 'extremism'—if you will allow me to use the word rather loosely—the absence of which I have just been deploring in the life and works of some of our literary geniuses. Here it would be a case of erotic or sentimental 'extremism,' which it would be a great mistake to confuse with despair, even though it may often borrow the language of the latter. Decidedly, your mistress must give you much pleasure, lucky Philippe."

"She's not bad," conceded the young man. "But she's beginning to bore me, boss."

"Ditch her," said Tony fiercely.

"Not yet. She'll do for another month or two."

"Are you going to her tonight?"

"Yes."

"Well, strangle her!" said Tony, bursting out laughing. "Strangle her, if she's so crazy for it! Say," he continued, suddenly becoming serious, "d'you think you'd be up to strangling someone?"

"Yes, you, when you get my goat," said Philippe.

"I'd like to see you try."

Philippe suddenly clutched Tony by the throat with both hands. He forced him down on to the sofa and drove his knee into Tony's chest. Tony threshed the air with his arms.

"Christ!" he panted, when Philippe let him go at last. "He'd do it, the swine. He's as strong as an ox. You've hurt me, you know." He seized Philippe's left hand and examined its palm. "But I'm sorry, chum, you die before me. Your life line's damn short!"

Philippe pulled his hand away quickly.

"I've been told that before, but I don't believe in all that kind of stuff," he said, frowning.

"You are right," said M. Merkel. "Do not believe in destiny. Destiny does not exist. Live, amuse yourself, enjoy your lovely youth without worrying about the future. Exhaust all the delights of love with your beautiful compatriot. For she is a compatriot of yours, is she not?"

"Yes, we're from the same town."

"You live in the south, if I am not mistaken? The Basque coast? It appears to be charming country. The race is ardent, as appears to be proven by the fine amorous epistle you have just read to us. I do not know the Basque coast yet. Maybe we'll go there one day. Savoy, the Massif Central, we have had a lot of mountain air this winter. The sea-side might do us a lot of good, for a change. *Thalassa! Thalassa!*"

"Ta what?" asked Tony.

"It's a Greek word, the cry with which Xenophon's soldiers hailed the sea."

Hélène was stretched out on the bed, her face immobile and set like a mask. Gérard's visit had exhausted her. But Philippe would soon be here. He would be here. She had not seen him for two weeks. Where had he been? What had he been doing? How did he live? By black market operations, probably. But what did it matter? She would have loved him had he been a murderer. Philippe's soul meant less than nothing to her. Arrogantly, she reduced him to what he really was: a body, something that gave her pleasure. It was her way of flouting fate even now, of being defiant and affirming her freedom in the midst of degradation. A thing that gave her pleasure, a body. Philippe's body.

In the deathlike mask of her face, the nostrils quivered. Soon he would be here. And poor Gérard, who had wanted to take her to the theater this evening. There would be no more friendly evenings with Gérard. Never again. There would never be anything beyond this waiting for the night, beyond this nocturnal heaven and hell. Nothing else. Once and for all time, the choice had been made. There was no going back, no compromise, no possible coming to terms with God and the world. And that poor Gérard, who had come to offer her his plan for heroic actions. Too late now. There was no light and no shadow left now, neither just nor unjust ones. The adversaries had become indistinguishable, and the earth could be consumed in a universal holocaust. "The crack of doom." In Shakespeare, there was always this call to total destruction, the death cries sounding again and again, always the same. "I wish the estate o' the world were now undone. . . ." To reach the point where you would welcome the rain of fire that destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah with indifference, possibly even with joy. As long as he was with her at that minute when the world came to an end. As long as his body was close to hers. Perhaps Paris would be destroyed one day, mercilessly bombed, as London had been and still was being. I do not want to think of London, I do not want to think of England. If I think of England, I shall have to cry out with horror, and I do not want to. It is no use. The letter has gone and will surely arrive. Whatever happens, there is no going back, no possible compromise or pardon. The letter will surely arrive. That kind of letter always arrives. I do not want to think of it, I don't want to. He has read it. He cannot have understood it at first. And yet it was simple and clear. "*Jean, you must not think of me any longer. You must forget everything about me.*" That is clear. I do not want to see the gesture he surely made—passing his hand over his forehead. I do not want to see that gesture. Philippe, Philippe darling. I do not want to see. Perhaps he is dead. He has been killed during a bombing attack or on a mission. Many pilots are killed. Flying is very dangerous. It would be better, a thousand times better, if he had died before reading my letter. But he has read it: that kind of letter is always received. Always. He passed his hand over his forehead without understanding. And yet I had to send that letter. I had no right not to send it. I am not the kind of girl who compromises with conscience. No matter what you do, never lie, never deceive. I have not lied. I don't do that sort of thing. And I am not one of those bold women who find serenity in sin. Where have I read that? In *Phèdre*, of course. Always cultured, Mlle de Balansun. A nice girl:

a very nice girl, to be sure. He can't have understood. His hand on his forehead, he read my letter two, three times over. "*We will never belong to each other. I am no longer your betrothed, Jean. I have broken our engagement. Some time ago I wrote to you: 'You wait, and then comes a day when you wonder what you are waiting for, and you get up and open your arms to the first stranger passing by.' Well, it has happened; I have got up and opened my arms to somebody. I shall not justify myself. You have no right to judge me. I expect neither condemnation nor forgiveness from you. No matter how much you may be suffering now, remember that I could have lied—you couldn't have told by looking at me that I had deceived you. I could have lied while I was waiting for you, and even lied when you came back, and yet I have chosen to tell the truth. Some day, you will remember that. But I do not even wish it: I would rather that you forget me entirely. Good-by, Jean. I am suffering because of the pain I have caused you. . . .*" He must have passed his hand over his forehead, without understanding. And yet I had to send that letter. I must not let myself go. I didn't weaken when I signed the letter, when I slipped it into the envelope. I clenched my teeth. Poor little Francis, who passed it on so happily, so quickly. . . . Spain, Portugal, the sea, England. So many hands. So many risks, so many chances that the letter would not arrive. And yet it has surely been received, that letter. There is a special Providence for messengers of ill fortune. I mailed it in March, more than a month ago. It must have arrived. He has read it. Oh, I mustn't weaken. Perhaps he was killed before the letter reached him. I don't want to think any more. Philippe darling, Philippe. He'll soon be here. I don't want to think of anything except tonight. Philippe, with his large innocent hands. Philippe, he'll be here soon. And my remorse and suffering will vanish in the heaven and hell of night. Night. The radiant peace of his body and the night—and nothing else.

Gérard had dined alone that evening. He partook of a substantial meal à la carte at the Auberge Bleue. It cost one sixth of his monthly salary. But what a dinner! Sole, roast chicken, salad, pêche Melba, a Frontignan de Châteauneuf, real coffee with sugar, and a little glass of Armagnac. He wasn't very hungry but he forced himself to do honor to these good things. He even ordered a second glass of Armagnac and then a third. *Après moi le déluge*, he told himself. *Après nous*, deportation to Poland, the American landing, or a hundred kilo bomb on one's head. At the third Armagnac, he began to smile to himself and to de-

plore, not without humor, that that fool of an Hélène had refused his invitation. But he didn't give a damn about Hélène any more. Smiling complacently, he sat with his vest unbuttoned, his hand clasping the glass of Armagnac with the traditional gesture of the gourmet, and decided that he didn't give a damn about Hélène now. He rejoiced that he had "liquidated" her, and had liquidated ten years of bleating adoration. "I will try to get on without your esteem from now on." And that's that, he said to himself. He felt well, his head was light, his spirit kindly, and a pleasant warmth radiated from the pit of his stomach.

His eye wandered indulgently around the dining room of the Auberge. Charming décor, and the crowd wealthy and distinguished. No lamb among those people, he thought to himself. They were more of the butcher type, though discreetly so. Not one of them could have bleated for years at a girl who exploited his love with skill and ease. This harsh reflection led him to a path strewn with bitterness. He pictured "those people" at the age of twenty, their arrogant jaws, their self-assured gait, fully conscious of what they wanted and resolved to achieve it by any means. They had come at the right time. They did not belong to a sacrificed generation (so the worthy Gérard thought, for he believed firmly in the tragedy of the upper classes in 1935, 1936, and 1937). Even today these people knew what they wanted. And tomorrow, no matter what the outcome of the war might be, regardless of the results of the present chaos—in the midst of which they had lived so well, with their arrogant jaws and their potbellies—they would also find a way to get on the safe side, with all the honors that the world showers on the rich and the smart ones. (So thought the worthy Gérard, who sometimes was as ruthless a revolutionary as Jules Vallès.) Thereupon, despite the bouquet of the Châteauneuf on his palate and the pleasant warmth radiating from the pit of his stomach, young Gérard, class '35, sacrificed generation, began to improvise lusty epigrams that he mentally attached to the fat necks of the diners around him. For them, he said to himself, nothing is lost, except their honor. This parody delighted him. He repeated it several times: nothing is lost except honor. But that was lost so long ago. Besides, honor is like an appendix, you can live very well without it, anyone can tell you that. Everybody except the lambs, of course. (The epigrams, like boomerangs, came to roost in the "quivering flesh" of the archer himself.) The lambs, that's the funny thing about them, need each other's esteem. They need to be told that they aren't filthy swine, wretched collaborators of the New Order, cowards,

and weaklings. Don't make me laugh! They need to be watched, judged, and approved.

At this juncture, Gérard's thoughts soared to a higher plane; despite the exquisite and stupefying glow of the Armagnac; they assumed a soberly pathetic hue, expressing all the "contemporary anguish." My estimate of myself, he thought, won't stop torturing me, unless I have just that: someone watching over me, approvingly and forgivingly. But why must it torture me, this idea I have of myself? These people dining around me, these elegant, wealthy, distinguished people have made up their minds to be what they are. Why shouldn't I do the same? I am certainly not cut out to be a hero; I do not believe any cause is worth dying for, and I have no faith. So perhaps to win peace of mind, I only have to believe I'm not too vile, too contemptible. That's already done. I have handed in my resignation at—I have refused to compromise, by my writings, my actions or my words, with those who have joined the side of the victors. Perhaps, then, I need only to dissociate myself a little more from this mess for which I am not responsible, for which, once and for all, I decline every responsibility. Let them fight it out among themselves, let their tanks and their bombers decide. I don't want to have anything to do with them; there is no sure sign to show me which side is right. And yet, just this morning, I thought I was on the verge of deciding. To choose, even without faith. It would have been enough for *her* to choose and I would have been saved. It would have been enough for her to agree and I would joyfully have faced every risk and braved every death, because I would have felt her look fixed on me, approving me, absolving me—perhaps one day even admiring me. Joyfully, because even though I lack faith, her look of esteem and sisterly affection would have given me the certainty I need. I try to picture to myself what that companionship in our fight could have been, the weary gentleness at the end of the day, the happy, trusting smile, her hand on mine. I went to her like a supplicant: "Say a word and my soul will be saved." But she didn't say the word. She only laughed, contemptuously and bitterly. She cast me back into the night and she remained in the night. And instead of the young girl Hélène, instead of my amazon, there was that strange creature, beautiful and painted, with a harsh smile, in the depth of her night. There was only that strange creature, far away, who lighted one cigarette after the other with a gesture reminiscent of the brothel.

I despise her, he told himself. I despise her. But Gérard was not at

his ease with his contempt; he was unused to it. Many contemporary authors whom he admired, Montherlant, Malraux, and others had, each in his own way, included contempt in their respective philosophies. The worthy Gérard, class '35, etc., had no luck: the first time he met them on that level, it was in the experience of a humiliating contempt, sour and sad as remorse, the contempt that follows on adoration and tramples on fallen idols. Then, as the young man was not gifted with a powerfully original mind, he did what the heroes of popular romances and screen lovers do when they want to forget the wretchedness of their condition or stifle their conscience: he ordered a fourth glass of Armagnac. He was fairly far advanced in spiritual confusion at the time, but he did notice his own reflection in a mirror and grinned at it like a character in a Russian novel.

The maître d'hôtel of the Auberge Bleue was keeping a close eye on the young diner who could not make up his mind to go home. It was nearly closing time, but the young man, now alone in the dining room, did not move. He had sunk right back on his seat, with a dazed look, his hand clutching the empty glass. Probably he was rather drunk. The maître d'hôtel came up to him and coughed ostentatiously.

"I regret, monsieur, we are closing now. It is eleven o'clock."

"Ah, yes—eleven o'clock. I'm going, excuse me."

"Monsieur's coat," called the maître d'hôtel.

Gérard got up. His equilibrium was none too steady. He bent toward the maître d'hôtel.

"Say," he murmured, "could you tell me where there is a night club around here, a place open all night, dancing and drinking—and women. Know what I mean?"

The headwaiter understood. He pondered and gave an address.

"But try to find a carriage," he advised, "because of the curfew."

Gérard touched the brim of his hat with a formal gesture and went toward the exit.

At dawn, Gérard was leaving the place which the maître d'hôtel had suggested. He was dazed and drunk with exhaustion. He looked more dead than alive. He consulted his watch and thought that in two and a half hours' time he would have to be at the College. It was no longer a question of choosing with or without faith. No longer a question of wavering between Hélène, Pierre, and the distinguished butchers of the Auberge. It was Monday morning, the beginning of the week, oh,

dreary truism!—and you had to earn your daily bread. In two hours' time, he would go to the College to deliver a lecture on Pascal to the brats of the bourgeoisie living in the 16th *arrondissement*. Morning thoughts are invariably lucid.

At about the same time, Hélène woke up. She had come to love these awakenings, the sharp yet drowsy happiness she felt. The sight of Philippe asleep beside her, the warm contact of his body, the island of sweet and burning languor that was their two bodies. Much later, Philippe woke up. She propped herself up on one elbow to watch him. Philippe's awakening was a pathetic and touching mystery. He emerged very slowly and painfully from his sleep, as though he were being dragged from the limbo of felicity into a hostile universe. He half raised his eyelids, revealing eyes that were still sightless, white and empty, and closed them again immediately, as though terrified at what he had seen. For a second he would dive back into limbo, with a grunt like an animal, and his swollen face, strangely molded by night and sleep, seemed to have become the blind, beautiful head of a deep-sea monster and assumed a formidable majesty, senseless, almost divine. He stretched an arm out of the covers; his hand opened, the fingers separated slowly, like a starfish unfolding its tentacles. He sighed. Rising, he sat down on the bed, bent forward, his arms hanging down, his head lowered, in silence. He stared at Hélène in lofty amazement; who was she? What was she doing here beside him? Little by little, the monster of the depths recovered its human aspect: the expression of the blind head changed from senselessness to a faraway sadness, which seemed to come from the night of time. Hélène knew that she would have to wait an hour or more for this child, exiled from the dark womb of sleep, to become accustomed to the day and to life, and to reintegrate his being. How she loved him like this, feeble, innocent, disarmed! She kissed his mouth, his breath was a little acid like that of a small child waking up.

That morning, Philippe stared at her as usual, his eyes filled with a dumb question (who is this woman?) and a childish, sad reproach (why is she here, close to me?). Then a gleam of recognition flashed up in their depths.

"Christ, how lousy you look first thing in the morning, my poor girl!" Philippe murmured.

Five weeks later, Hélène received a Red Cross message through the intermediary of Francis. It was dated February, 1943, and bore the postmark "Newcastle." It contained three lines in a careful handwriting that she knew well.

Visit from Francis' friend. Very happy news. Sent already four messages. Have they arrived? Hope reunited soon. Have faith. Thousand kisses. Jean.

SUMMER, 1943

1.

ONCE again, Saint-Clar had triumphed over the winter. Saint-Clar had come through the fourth winter of the war without the death rate rising any higher than in the preceding period of economic prosperity. This little town was privileged. Lying on the frontier between the Béarn and the Basque country, in a smiling fertile countryside, Saint-Clar had been famous before 1939 for its *foie gras* and its hams, known as "*jambons de Bayonne*." Notwithstanding the suction pump of the German occupation, the resources of this abundant Arcady were by no means exhausted. Nearly all the inhabitants of Saint-Clar possessed a more or less modest vegetable garden and cultivated the potato, the staple of France's diet, with feverish activity. Though the peasants of the neighborhood were rather grasping, most of them were fairly generous to their friends in town and so every family in Saint-Clar could count on the friendly help of some farm in a neighboring village, besides growing their own vegetables. A system of meticulous barter was introduced: fowls, eggs, and fruit were exchanged for a pair of sandals, spices, coffee, new soles, a letter of recommendation, or some private lessons. The butchers serenely committed the offense of clandestine slaughtering, assisted by the population. In a word, the food situation hurt no one in Saint-Clar, with the exception of two inveterate female sots who could not survive the restrictions on wine. (They were too poor to maintain their prewar rations: when they were reduced to one liter a week, these amiable bacchantes hastened to leave this desperately dry world and slake their thirst in the vineyards of eternity.)

Haunted by the specter of famine, admittedly fairly remote, the Clarois rapidly developed an existential philosophy shorn of ontological or eschatological concepts, but containing a moral of remarkable solidity, despite its brevity. They consented, faced with a critical situation pregnant with threats of every kind, to put the free flame of intelligence under a bushel—surely a heroic application of the black-out!—and to reduce their entire being temporarily to the humiliating functions of a

digestive tube. The Clarois gorged themselves. A papal dispensation had already suppressed fasting on Friday. This was excuse enough to let loose in Saint-Clar a crusade in favor of plenary indulgence. Stimulated by these wise measures, the Clarois drew an inference from it which the Vatican had certainly not foreseen. They carried logical deduction to its extreme consequences with the same furious dialectic, which drove Origenes to carry out by his own hand the ablation of his virility. All the care, all the efforts of this valiant population were directed toward assuring that they should be nourished rather better than in peacetime. The big "blowout" attained the dignity of a civic duty. Miracles of double talk were prevalent everywhere. Patriotic slogans were circulated, such as: "Gorge yourselves, it's that much less for the '*Vert-de-gris*.'"

On all social levels, conversation centered around culinary subjects. Incidentally, these principles did not escape the usual disadvantages of most high moral principles: they were far easier for the rich to practice. Certain Croesuses of Saint-Clar were virtuous with pride: their First Communion banquets attained a Roman opulence, so that, at vespers, one could hear little boys and girls proclaiming their disdain of Satan, his pomps and works, in gay voices, interrupted by discreet burps.

This ostentation could not fail to irritate the more humble inhabitants of Saint-Clar. For in spite of a general desire for self-effacement and neutrality, the whole of spiritual life was not yet abolished and the spirit of criticism demanded its rights. Criticizing each other was a favorite occupation of the Clarois population. The Occupation had not only exaggerated the ancient caste rivalries, reawakened and excited old personal rancors, it had, by creating relatively fabulous riches in the course of a few months and overturning a social structure that one had believed enduring and static, created new rivalries and rancors, that were further exacerbated by the passions of partisanship. Already shortly before the war, during the great governmental crises between 1936 and 1939, the Clarois had learned to think of the world in terms of Left and Right, liberalism and totalitarianism, secularity and clericalism. Under the Occupation, these good people developed a political conscience. Worthy housewives listened every night to the broadcasts and entered into impassioned discussions in the market place on the respective chances of the Reich and the Allies, on Freemasonry and the Jews, the Fascists, Roosevelt. The battle of Tobruk was won and lost over and over again at the family supper table or at the bar of the bistros. Mme Costellot was not above giving Montgomery advice of an elementary

nature on African strategy. Hitler was in a tight corner at Saint-Clar, and in certain circles Churchill himself came in for round abuse. As to the Marshal, with the exception of a few strong-minded individuals who habitually referred to him as "*vieux con*," he enjoyed more or less general esteem, at least during the first few months of his reign. (Later on, his prestige diminished at an increased tempo, the nearer the day of liberation approached. In August, 1944, the affection enjoyed by the Marshal had decreased so far that his portrait automatically fell off the walls of all the houses, to be replaced by that of General de Gaulle.) Venomous Anglophobes, like Mme Costellot, came up against bewildered Anglophiles, like M. de Balansun. It must be admitted that there were also many Clarois who abstained from taking sides, either out of indifference, or out of crafty prudence, or for the simple reason that they were disgusted with a conflict in which they did not feel they owed any allegiance.

The town possessed a dozen alert female messengers, whose functions included those of town crier and disinterested prophetess. Berthe was one of the most active among them. She had changed very much in the course of the last two or three years. The visits of the Evil One had become more frequent since the arrival of the Germans in Saint-Clar. Mme Delahaye was becoming vaguely distressed about them. She was genuinely alarmed the day Berthe burned the soup and excused herself by declaring that the "deuce" had come to have his will with her on the kitchen table just as she was going to take the casserole off the fire. Mme Delahaye, in her consternation, immediately sat down at a little table and summoned Vincent d'Indy, begging him to reveal whether further attacks were to be expected from the objectionable incubus. As a result of the extremely pessimistic answer of the spirit, the lady conceived, albeit in fear and trembling, the audacious project of giving Berthe a week's notice. The pressing attentions of the "deuce" had actually produced deplorable results with regard to the running of the household. Berthe no longer cared what time meals were served, she neglected her work and ran around the town, spreading the good word from door to door. Saint-Clar greatly appreciated Berthe's fund of local gossip: she knew every story, the reasons for every drama, the secret motives of every action, however harmless it might appear. She built up her recitals with a fine sense of dramatic progression and a passionate conviction, which would have shaken Saint Thomas himself. Berthe lived in an almost uninterrupted state of frenzy; a panting rhapsodist, she was subject to obsessional hates, like Mme Costellot, but with the

difference that she did not bother to furnish them with an ideological twist. Thus, since the Count had spoken to her so harshly, she looked upon him as a dangerous maniac, an unenlightened despot and an inveterate enemy of the Marshal. She repeated everywhere that M. de Balansun had ordered her to throw the Marshal's portrait into the dustbin. To hear Berthe, one could have imagined that he had committed an act of odious obscurantism, resembling the assassination of Archimedes by the Roman trooper.

For some time she had been ill disposed toward her mistress. Berthe belonged to the kind of domestic who must be treated roughly: she would have rolled like a fawning animal at the feet of a master who had beaten her. She had gone in fear of the composer, whose girth and prestige had overawed her. But Mme Delahaye had neither girth nor prestige. Her self-effacement, her physical and moral myopia, and her natural gentleness furnished Berthe with so many weapons against her. The servant, whose degree of evolution was not much superior to that of primitive man, saw in the self-effacement nothing but weakness and in the myopia mere stupidity. She took advantage of them with the brutality of the simple-minded, to affirm her independence, to give free rein to her native rudeness and, above all, to neglect her duties. To the ordinary grievances which Berthe nourished against her mistress were added the latter's amicable relations with M. de Balansun. For Berthe, there was not the shadow of a doubt that the Count was Mme Delahaye's lover. She even suspected that this adulterous relationship had already existed "in the time of that poor Monsieur." This concubine of Lucifer saw the whole world as a vast concern of criminal copulation, and for her, as for the great majority of the simple, the only really shameful sins were those of a sexual nature. The fact that the protagonists had reached the canonical age was no guarantee of their purity in Berthe's eyes. Many a time she had tried, by unexpectedly entering the drawing room on some futile pretext, to catch them in the act of libidinous contact, and the fact that she had never succeeded did not shake her in this suspicion. When Friedrich Rustiger came to lodge at Mme Delahaye's and it was established that his hostess treated him with maternal solicitude, Berthe had no illusion as to the nature of this solicitude and delighted in informing her neighbors and friends that the Count had got what was coming to him: at last he had been cuckolded, and cuckolded by a German. She expatiated with relish on the attentions of Mme Delahaye toward Rustiger, and invented that the old lady locked herself up with him in the drawing room under the

pretext of listening to phonograph records. Naturally, nobody in Saint-Clar believed in the actual unchastity of Mme Delahaye. But Berthe was considered as a witness of good faith, even though she might deform the facts by her dramatic interpretation. Popular opinion saw in Mme Delahaye an ancient light o' love still addicted to senile complaisances, a frantic collaborator, and a crazy old witch, whose table turning was evidence of diabolical propensities.

When Mme Costellot met Berthe on the market place, she condescended to ask her about the latest scandals of the town, thus, in a manner of speaking, taking the moral and political temperature of Saint-Clar, rather like a politician might interview the gossips and hooligans of the slums to learn the drift of public opinion. She would return to the Lardennes brimming over with exciting news, but she always waited for her son to be out of the way before she retailed it. Jacques had no curiosity concerning the collective life of Saint-Clar. It even happened one evening, when Mme Costellot was relating a local anecdote, that he rose from the dinner table and left the room, banging the door behind him, an action that enraged his mother and caused Gisèle, his wife, to burst into tears. Jacques was intractable. "An impossible character!" declared Mme Costellot. He had fits of cold rage that made him grow pale and tremble; he could be unaccountably scornful, savagely ironical. His habitual attitude was one of nonchalant indifference. Yet this was compensated by solid qualities: he had a business acumen that made him a worthy successor of his father-in-law, he was, in actual fact, the guardian of the Lardenne fortune (he administered the branches at Dax, Mont-de-Marsan, and Bordeaux; he looked after the farms and holdings, as well as the apartment houses at Auteuil). And finally, he was elegant and handsome, with an imperceptible touch of aristocratic decadence; a brilliant conversationalist when he chose, on the moral plane a good husband, taking it by and large, despite certain stays in Paris that did not always appear justified by the necessity of contacting firms or agents in the metropolis. Mme Costellot suspected her son of keeping mistresses in Paris. She excused him in secret, for "la petite Gisèle," a good girl, was rather dull. Besides, she was of the opinion that these small departures from conjugal fidelity—as long as they remained discreet—could be overlooked in a young man like Jacques, who was, figuratively speaking, of royal descent. Kings could not be expected to follow the rules of current morality, thought Mme Costellot.

In Berthe's tales, the name of Mme Arréguy was frequently repeated.

The inhabitants of Saint-Clar had not much use for that Parisian who had not succeeded in acclimatizing herself. Her intrigue with Werner, the N.C.O. in charge of the military post at the demarcation line, aroused the indignation of the town at least as much as the liaison between the head of the *Kommandatur* and the manageress of *Coryse Salomé*. Public indignation attained a climax on a summer day in 1943, when Mme Arréguy was seen taking a sun bath on the bank of the Gave, stretched out beside Werner. The immodest creature was clothed in the briefest of bathing costumes. When she let down the top of her suit to expose a still firm breast to the rays of the sun, the spectators who were watching the pair from the bridge above, were amazed that this scandalous audacity was not punished then and there by a thunderbolt out of the blue sky. Everybody predicted that Mme Arréguy would come to a terrible end: hospital, general paralysis, decline, and d.t. Nevertheless, it was hoped that her debauchery would leave her sufficiently lucid so that she could be efficaciously pilloried when the day of reckoning came.

In this manner Saint-Clar lived, divided between political and emotional rivalries and questions of food supplies; Saint-Clar that had so nobly decided to renounce the free exercise of reason in order to concentrate on the problems of the moment and the *saue qui peut*; Saint-Clar, triumphing for the fifth time over the rigors of winter and now being rewarded for its patience by a magnificent summer. The young people bathed in the swimming pool; on Sunday they lined up in front of the movie; money was circulating more freely than it had ever done before. People waited for the war news of the next morning with more impatience than the readers of *Le Patriote* waited for the sequel of the historical *feuilleton* about Gaston le Roux. Nobody was bored. The demarcation line, which had been a nuisance, had now been done away with.

Francis no longer led anybody across into the Free Zone, which was no longer a free zone. But his activities became more interesting: Darricade entrusted him with several missions, sometimes very delicate ones, in Bordeaux, Pau, Bayonne. All this had not hindered him from passing his final examinations rather brilliantly in July. In ordinary times, he might have considered a career in Colonial administration (Francis sometimes dreamed of a destiny like that of Lyautey). However, in view of the practical impossibility of realizing this ambition, he resigned himself for the time being to studying from October on for his law degree, while he worked in his father's office. Darricade re-

ceived Mme Arréguy secretly. He managed to steer a middle course between the caste and family rivalries of Saint-Clar, flattering some and reassuring others, anxious to gain friends everywhere in view of the elections after the war. Everywhere: among the working population, who would automatically vote for him when they heard about his clandestine activities; among the conservative bourgeoisie in whom, when the day came, the loyalty of Darricade for the person of General de Gaulle would inspire confidence; among the peasant farmers whom he would be able to conciliate at the opportune moment by declaring openly against collectivism. There was nothing of the romantic fighter about Darricade. Derailing trains, cutting telegraph wires, blowing up bridges, distributing pamphlets, and attacking people in the streets—all that was not at all in his line. He preferred a less spectacular and more passive job—that of liaison officer, relaying messages, and secret information. Only rarely did he expose himself by undertaking a mission in person: he had two or three trusty adjutants, young men of Saint-Clar, one of whom was Francis, whom he charged with these “fatigues.” It must be admitted that the needs of the region, as far as dissident activity was concerned, were not very pressing, for this section was not of great strategical importance; the countryside was too civilized and too densely populated to offer a hiding place for the *maquisards*. Thus Darricade was not unduly encumbered by his mission. This provincial Machiavelli kept up cordial relations with Mme Costellot and the Lardennes, as a matter of fact with the entire bourgeoisie of Saint-Clar (although in this, as in everything else, he was extremely discreet) and several times he had taken *apéritifs* with von Brackner in the Lardennes’ house. Von Brackner took Darricade for a genuine follower of the Marshal and the New Order. After all, one cannot be too prudent when the good cause is at stake; and in periods of terror, an artful duplicity is essential.

During that summer of 1943, M. de Balansun was finishing his biography of Gaston le Roux in a frenzy of enthusiasm. The last chapter, conceived as a kind of apotheosis, reminiscent of a “*trionfo*” painted on a Venetian ceiling, described the Baron’s return to a liberated Saint-Clar, and his sudden death in the flower of his youth and at the climax of his glory. (Gaston le Roux had caught a chill while enjoying the cool of the evening from the keep of his castle.)

Thus life went on in Saint-Clar, in the indolent heat of summer. At night, the opaque darkness of the curfew enveloped the town in a silence that might have preceded the end of the world, yet was interrupted

every hour by the slow, almost automatic hammering of the patrol. Up on the hill, among the feudal ruins, walked the disillusioned phantom of Gaston le Roux, who had seen worse things in his time.

2.

HÉLÈNE had come to spend the summer holidays at Saint-Clar as she did every year. She pleaded work at the university, a series of highly interesting lectures on Einstein's physics, to explain why she must shorten her stay by a month. M. de Balansun approved, while he deplored the tyranny of advanced studies. Mme de Balansun gave her daughter a long look, sad and a little anxious. She was not easily duped; there were no lectures in August and September, the university was closed. Yet she made no comment. She was a self-effacing woman, humble and discreet. Francis also looked at his sister. He saw her distressed expression as she became entangled in her explanations. He lowered his eyes and blushed.

From the first day of her home-coming, almost from the first minute, Francis had noticed that his big sister had changed. He was very fond of Héléne, and proud of her. This year during the summer holiday he failed to "find her again," just as Gérard had done a few months earlier. Something strange had happened. There was no longer any contact between them. In the old days, Héléne and Francis had been like two friends of the same age, united by the childish fraternal bond that does away with the difference in years. They had shared certain ancient jokes that had become a ritual, and had neither meaning nor savor for anyone but themselves, a stock of allusions to familiar episodes or comic figures of Saint-Clar (for instance, to Mme Lardenne, who provided them with an inexhaustible fund of amusement by her amazing clothes and even more by her malapropisms, as when she mentioned the "refineries of cruelty" practiced on the Spanish Carmelites). When they were alone, they had sometimes laughed till they cried, remembering some verbal eccentricity of their father's, whom they called, with affectionate disrespect, "the noble officer of the law." Francis used to talk of his college and his studies and ask his sister to explain some difficult mathematical problem to him. For a long time they had also shared a great common interest—the scout movement. Today nothing of all this seemed to have survived. From the beginning of the holidays, Francis had found his sister embarrassed and ill at ease with him and her

efforts to appear natural were awkward and in vain. The standing old jokes no longer amused her, her laughter sounded forced. She did not seem to be really there. Her beautiful tired face hardly ever lighted up. Francis was shy and intensely reticent where moral questions were concerned. He was dimly conscious of the change in H  l  ne, a serious change, and this paralysed him in turn. He caught himself blushing as she looked at him when they were alone together and she made such obvious efforts to initiate an animated conversation. The link was broken. The old understanding between them was dead. "Perhaps it's because I have grown up," Francis said to himself. "I am no longer a little boy. I'm eighteen. That is why we can't be as close as we used to be." He had heard, or perhaps read somewhere, that with the years, family affections merge into indifference. "I am just at the awkward age," he also told himself. One evening, he had a good look in the mirror of his bedroom at the face of this boy at the awkward age. It was not an unpleasant face. The unprepossessing down that had covered it when he was fifteen had disappeared. It was a lovable face, though still a childish one. He cried a little that evening, feeling terribly ashamed, knowing that a fellow of eighteen who cries for such a reason must be a sissy. And a fellow who claims to serve his country, what's more! The heroes of Plutarch, so dear to M. de Balansun, what would they have said?

The Count himself had not noticed anything unusual until the day when his wife, in the intimacy of the conjugal chamber, confessed her anxiety to him: might not H  l  ne's depression be due to illness? Might it not be wise to consult the doctor? M. de Balansun raised his arms to heaven—"Figments of the maternal brain!"—and incontinently recited a satirical couplet about "sawbones," for whom he nourished a mistrust worthy of Moli  re. Nevertheless, the next morning he asked H  l  ne to follow him into the drawing room, pressed her against his heart, invited her to be seated and, taking up his position under the portrait of his ancestor, embarked on a voluble discourse.

"My child, since the beginning of the holidays, I notice that you are a prey to a persistent melancholy. Hush, not a word, do not protest! The vigilance of a father cannot be deceived for long. You no longer have that youthful gaiety that made you the sunbeam of this house. I am deeply grieved about this. Your mother, to whom I have confided my fears, has suggested the possibility of some physical unbalance, a conjecture that strikes me as lacking in any foundation, for the Balansuns are an eminently healthy race, untouched by the degeneration that, alas, can be found in many a family of the French aristocracy; for our

forebears were always wise enough to abhor even the idea of inter-marriage. Nevertheless, I am well aware that the female organism is delicate. And in any case it is advisable to watch with the utmost care to the proper functioning of our machinery. Therefore I do not hesitate to approach with absolute frankness a subject which most parents would only allude to very warily. Enough! You are a grown-up young girl, and besides, your scientific education has allowed you to throw off the sacrosanct taboos of the last century, without for a moment losing the restraint and modesty which must remain an attribute of a young person of your rank. Throw dissimulation to the winds, my dear Hélène, and confide frankly in your father: he can be told anything. Dispel my fears. Have you noticed in yourself any *malaise* of a physiological order, an organic unbalance . . . ?”

Hélène interrupted him quickly. No, certainly not; she was convinced that she was in the very best of health. Her father must set his mind completely at rest. She was very sorry to have disappointed her parents: they must forgive her for being in a state of exhaustion due to overwork and to the difficult living conditions in Paris at the moment. She was nervously depressed and tired out, but since she had come to Saint-Clar, she already felt much better.

The Count had spoken to her in the second person plural, as he always did when he addressed his family in the grandiloquent style, an exercise he enjoyed very much, as it allowed him to become his own listener. Now he reverted to the second person singular reserved for familiar effusions, domestic questions, and banal conversation.

“I am delighted, my little girl,” he said. “I did not really think you were ill or indisposed, as your mother feared, but we know how easily she is alarmed, poor woman! My own theory, I am convinced, comes much nearer the truth. You are tired of waiting. You are rather tired of waiting, is it not so, my darling, after so long a separation from . . . we understand each other!” He winked. “Ah, I have put my finger on the spot. Your silly old father is not such a fool after all!” He hurried over to her and kissed her. “Time seems very long, especially since that message, that dear, wonderful message of last May has increased a natural impatience. One languishes, as a chatelaine at the time of the crusades must have done, attended by her page, reading her Book of Hours, and waiting for her lord and master to return from the Holy Land!” At the word “page,” Hélène had started. “That is it. I have guessed right. My child, I sympathize with your sadness, but allow me to point out that you seem to pay scant heed to the many reasons we

now have for optimism. Do you not read the newspapers? The venal press, even though it is most adroit in disguising the facts, does not succeed entirely in hiding the truth from us. Believe your father: his eye is practiced at interpreting the mysteries of international politics. As to the field of operations—nothing of a military nature is alien to me, to change the famous aphorism of good old Terence!" he added with the little laugh of a jesting scholar. "Believe your father: the war will be over six months from now. Jean will come back to you covered with glory and radiant with love! We know that he is alive, that is already a great deal. Therefore, courage, H  l  ne, courage! Do not forget that you are a Balansun. Be firm, my child! Let us stand the test unflinchingly."

H  l  ne had risen to her feet. Her lips were trembling. She looked at her father, at his old face that was still noble and fresh in spite of its wrinkles, at his almost white hair, at his blue eyes filled with so confiding a light. Oh, that ingenuous tenderness of his, those effusions that reminded one of an affectionate old dog. She wrung her hands, pressing them against her breast.

"Papa," she stammered, "you must not—you must never speak to me of Jean again—I am—you must not. . . ."

"What are you saying?" exclaimed M. de Balansun, aghast.

She looked around helplessly and bit her lips. She was terrified at what she had nearly said. It was impossible, quite impossible.

"No, nothing—I don't quite know what I am saying, forgive me." She pressed her hand to her forehead. "I'm so tired, so tired."

"My darling child!" exclaimed the Count.

Suddenly H  l  ne made a step toward him. Her features were convulsed and the tears flowed uncontrollably over her face.

"Papa," she cried, "I don't want to go back to Paris!" She threw both her arms round the old man. "I want to stay with you always, always. Paris is horrible." Great sobs were shaking her. "I want to stay with you here. I will find work. I—we'll be happy together, we four. Don't let me leave again."

M. de Balansun felt her sagging in his arms. He held her up with all his strength: she was taller than he was. He called to his wife in a voice that trembled with anguish.

"A slight nervous breakdown," the doctor had declared. "It's nothing to worry about, absolutely nothing. She is very run down, that's all. She needs rest."

Now she was lying on the couch. It was evening. The table had been

laid in the drawing room, as on feast days. Mme de Balansun had prepared a little "*souper*" with Hélène's favorite dishes and desserts. It had only been achieved by a miracle of ingenuity and a considerable drain on the food reserves of the Balansun household. Without telling anybody, Francis had scoured the countryside on his bicycle and had returned miraculously laden with eggs, milk, and a liter of white wine: these purchases had made a great hole in his holiday budget, but he pretended that the farmers had given him all these good things in exchange for former services, such as passing letters into the Free Zone. . . . Mme de Balansun knew the rural population of the countryside only too well; she smiled tenderly and gave her little boy a kiss. On the other hand, M. de Balansun, who always found some appropriate remark for every circumstance, exalted in moving terms the generous gratitude of the retainers and gave free rein to a Virgilian nostalgia for the childlike customs of the land. He himself had just come up against the ruthless attitude of the townsfolk. A restaurant owner of Saint-Clar had roughly refused to let him have a bottle of champagne "for my sick daughter." Salaberry, the millionaire innkeeper, had merely replied with a figure: fifteen thousand francs the bottle. The Count, who had expected it to be two to three hundred francs (he could not get used to wartime prices) had felt a cold shiver penetrate to the very marrow of his bones. Regaining his composure, he answered haughtily, "I have no doubt that the Boches buy your champagne at that price, Salaberry, but I would have liked to believe that you did not care to profit by the distress of your compatriots." Salaberry shrugged his shoulders and shut the door in the Count's face. (It must, however, be said in fairness to Salaberry that this very pious Basque financed the Catholic guilds, devoted an ardent cult to Our Lady of Lourdes, and sent his sons to the College of Saint Bernhard at Bayonne.) Disgusted by so much selfishness, M. de Balansun felt the ancient hatred of his forebears for the commoners flaming up in him again. He rushed to his old friend Victor, gave him a highly colored description of his interview with the Basque and came home bearing two bottles of Roederer, an exploit that he attributed slyly to his eminent diplomatic qualities, "for," he affirmed, "I did not ask him for anything!" He also brought best wishes for Hélène's prompt recovery from Victor and his family.

It seemed that the good fairies had touched the Balansun household with their wand that evening: there were flowers on the table, the party dinner service, an abundant and choice menu, and champagne. Hélène had to eat of everything and empty a full glass; her father pressed her

as though she had just escaped death from starvation. The evening had unwittingly turned into a feast for the return of the prodigal. Hélène could hardly hold back her tears.

When the dinner was over, M. de Balansun advised his daughter to lie down on the couch and went to switch on the radio. He invited his family to listen to the B.B.C. He hoped that Hélène would find courage and hope from the exhortations of London, and thus hasten her convalescence. So they listened to the B.B.C., after M. de Balansun had tiptoed out into the hall to make sure that the German officer who had been quartered on them was not at home. At first there were some cryptic messages addressed to the fighters of the *maquis*. ("Minos meets Rhadamanthes," "a friend is coming this evening," "the beans of Soissons have been burned"). M. de Balansun, with a profoundly cunning air, glanced significantly at his family, and appreciated the undoubted effectiveness of these esoteric formulas by nodding his head vigorously. Then an indignant voice repeated one by one the recent insults of M. Philippe Henriot and threw them back in his teeth. Through the noise of the jamming. M. Maurice Schumann, London's first Frenchman next to General de Gaulle, incited, with noble audacity, the Frenchmen in France to attack the occupants. The military situation was described, and the broadcast ended with a comic ditty about Vichy.

Hélène had listened with her eyes closed; not a muscle of her face moved. Francis was sitting on the floor beside the couch. Hélène stroked his hair.

"Francis," she said, in a weak little voice, "papa has told me, you know. He made me swear not to speak to you about it. But you don't mind, do you?" She caressed his hair gently and looked at him with tenderness. "It's fine, Francis. I am proud of you, you know." (M. de Balansun, in spite of his conviction that "these things should remain between men," had soon told his wife and daughter of Francis' clandestine activities.) Francis looked at his sister and smiled. He had not felt so happy for a long time. His light eyes shone with brotherly affection. Hélène turned her head away.

She was thinking of Gérard, of the haughty way she had received him when he had come to speak to her of his desire to take part in the patriotic struggle. She had not been putting on an act for Gérard's benefit that evening, and this evening with Francis she was not acting either. She had been spontaneously sincere in both cases, contradictory as her attitude was. But she would have liked her sincerity this evening to wipe out the other. She was thirsting for goodness, for loyalty. She

would remain in Saint-Clar and work to help her people. A peaceful life of obscure devotion and humble work. "You are the proudest girl on earth!" Gérard's jest came back to her. No, this time it was not spiritual pride that was causing a passing attack of humility and mortification. It was something quite different, infinitely more tragic than pride: cowardice, fear. She was afraid of what was waiting for her when she returned to Paris: that loathing for work, the dullness of her days, and, above all, the fact that Philippe was abandoning her, his visits becoming rarer and rarer, and the fever, the barrenness, the nights. The abasement in which she had not found peace. But here she might perhaps find peace. They were there, all three of them, close to her, filled with affection for her, and so good, so pure, all three of them, papa, *maman*, Francis. She was safe here. It was quiet and warm. Again her hand stroked Francis' hair. M. de Balansun was talking about Mme Lardenne, who had had a "cruel disagreement" with her butcher yesterday. Mme Lardenne. Hélène raised her eyelids and met Francis' roguish look.

"He will submit her to refinements of crudity," whispered Francis.

They were both convulsed with silent laughter.

3.

THE MAN raised his arm. He was standing in the middle of the road. On the right, a pine forest rose up and filled the twilight air with its resinous scent; on the left, the indistinct, shadowy plain stretched away to the black line of another pine forest on the horizon. In front and behind the car, the road lay like a broad straight but hazy ribbon, not a house within five kilometers. Jacques Costellot, driving alone, had seen the man and drove straight at him at full speed, wondering whether he would leap aside and jump into the ditch. Caught in the beam of the headlights, his silhouette seemed to be approaching with sickening speed, as though sucked in by the light. When he was only ten yards away, Jacques took his foot off the accelerator and applied the brakes. As the car came to a stop, the man was but three yards away from the radiator. He hadn't moved. He dropped his arm and came toward the door of the car, carefully avoiding the mudguard. He was bareheaded and wore a very ordinary gray suit. Under his arm he carried a briefcase.

"Thank you," he said. "Are you going to Saint-Clar?"

"I am," Jacques replied.

"Would you give me a lift?"

"No."

"Why did you stop?" the man asked without hostility.

"There are *maquisards* in the neighborhood, chiefly Spanish refugees. They are armed. You might have shot at my tires."

"Oh, I see. You don't trust me."

"No. Show me your papers."

The stranger smiled.

"You think I look like a bandit?"

"No. But in the Landes, at this time of night, the heroes of today are just as dangerous as bandits."

"I'm not a hero. And here are my papers."

Jacques examined the identity card. Albert G  lin, born in Paris in 1907. The stamp of the Pr  fecture de Police was dated September, 1942.

"This card may be a forgery," he said. "What were you doing on this deserted road at eight o'clock in the evening?"

The man laughed openly.

"You may well ask! While I was behind a tree, you understand—" He made a vague gesture toward the pines. "My bike was stolen. I saw the thief pedaling away for all he was worth, while I was buttoning up my trousers. Funny, wasn't it?"

He laughed again and added in a philosophic tone:

"It's a silly story."

"But very apt," said Jacques. He handed back the identity card. "Have you been waiting a long time?"

"Oh, at least three hours. You're the first car—"

"That's a lie," said Jacques rudely. "A German car passed me twenty-five minutes ago."

"I saw it, but I don't like to bother those gentlemen."

He laughed again.

"You are a very suspicious young man, I must say."

"Get in," said Jacques.

He opened the door and as soon as the man had settled down beside him, drove off.

"You're lucky to have a car," said G  lin, after a short silence. "Perhaps you are a traveling salesman?"

"Do I look like one?" said Jacques. "No, I am not a salesman." He paused and then said, slowly and distinctly: "But I am on excellent terms with the French authorities—and with the German ones."

"Oh, I see."

Night had fallen. The car rushed on in its small island of light.

"Have you anywhere to stay in Saint-Clar?" asked Jacques.

"Could you recommend a hotel?"

"The only two hotels in Saint-Clar have been commandeered by the Germans. You won't get a room. Curfew starts at eleven o'clock."

"In that case, would you mind letting me out just before we reach town. I'll sleep in a field," he said good humoredly. "In August, that can still be quite pleasant."

There was a long silence, intensified by the humming of the engine. G  lin had laid his hands on his knees. Jacques noticed that they were covered with scratches and small clots of blood.

"Have you had an accident?" he asked, in a flat voice.

"An accident? Oh, you mean my hands. It's nothing. I had a fall." He laughed mockingly, and repeated, "I had a fall."

"From your bike, no doubt?" said Jacques.

"Yes . . . from my bike. That damned bike has brought me a lot of bad luck, hasn't it?"

Again there was a silence.

"I think there was a fire in the woods," Jacques remarked in a conversational tone. "I saw smoke and a red glow, not very far from the place where you stopped me."

"I saw it, too," said G  lin. "It was probably only a small fire."

"Yes, probably," said Jacques.

They did not speak again till they arrived at the outskirts of Saint-Clar. Jacques slowed down and stopped.

"I suggest you spend the night with me," he said. "I have a large house."

"You are very kind. But I wouldn't like to be a nuisance."

"Not in the least. Only my family might not quite understand if I brought home a stranger who had stopped me on the road, so it would be better if we had met at Dax. At the bar of the Splendide. We knew each other in 1940. I was a lieutenant in the cavalry. You, too. You understand?"

"Yes, I've got it. . . . How romantic!"

"Isn't it? Oh, I forgot. You should at least know my name. Jacques Costellot. I am twenty-nine."

"Jacques Costellot, aged twenty-nine. Pleased to meet you."

"So am I. By the way, will you be able to swap stories about an officers' mess—a French one?"

"Of course. I was an officer, too."

They looked each other straight in the eyes, intensely, but their faces remained expressionless. Gélín opened his briefcase and drew from it a package of cigarettes.

"Do you smoke?" he asked with a smile.

"Not black tobacco."

"These are Abdullahs."

"No doubt you have Turkish friends?"

Gélín laughed silently.

"No, Arabs. What a strange person you are!"

Jacques drove on. Three minutes later, he had the car in the garage. Before he opened the front door, he turned to Gélín, "I should know your plans for tomorrow."

"Saint-Clar is on the way to Toulouse, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Then I will take the first train to Toulouse tomorrow morning."

"Good. Another thing: we must say 'tu' to each other. Do you think you can manage it? Wartime buddies always call each other 'tu'—in France."

"I know. I will have no difficulty in calling you 'tu.'"

They went inside the house. M. Lardenne and Gisèle received them.

"Listen, Gisèle, you remember Albert, the friend I told you so much about? You know, Albert, who is of Flemish origin?"

She could not remember, but that did not matter. Mme Costellot, whose mind was so much better organized, remembered very well: Albert, of course. Albert made an excellent impression on the family. He kissed the ladies' hands. A gentleman, evidently, in spite of his ready-made suit from the "Samaritaine." Probably he had hit hard times.

They repaired to the dining room after Albert had washed his hands; they were now impeccable.

"Isn't von Brackner here?" asked Jacques.

"He's coming down in a minute," said Mme Costellot.

Jacques turned to Albert.

"Von Brackner is an officer of the *Kommandatur*," he explained negligently. "He lives here and has dinner with us. I ought to have told you before. But you have no objection, I suppose?"

The answer came after an infinitesimal pause, "Certainly not, Jacques, not in the least."

And a wide smile spread over Albert's face.

"I thought you wouldn't mind," said Jacques, affably and understandingly.

Von Brackner appeared in the doorway. He was tall, spare, and rather distinguished looking. Jacques introduced G lin to him as an old friend who had been in the same regiment. Von Brackner clicked his heels and bent nearly double.

"Delighted to meet you," he declared.

Albert appeared to be equally delighted.

They sat down to dinner. During the meal it became quite evident to the family that M. G lin was most decidedly a gentleman. His table manners were perfect. He knew how to behave. He spoke little, listened well, and smiled discreetly. M. Lardenne noticed that his syntax was sometimes rather surprising, very original, in fact. And everybody, with the exception of von Brackner, who could not be expected to notice these subtleties, had been struck by the slightly singing inflections of his voice. But Jacques had said that Albert was of Flemish origin through his mother.

The conversation was animated, sparkling even. It centered on the gossip of Saint-Clar. Von Brackner knew the town well; he had resided there for over a year. He was Second in Command to the Colonel in charge of the *Kommandatur*. He informed his hosts that one had an excellent opinion "in high places" of the behavior of Saint-Clar's inhabitants. There was a question of awarding a medal for civic merit to the town, in recognition of its good treatment of the German troops. Von Brackner expatiated on this. He appeared charmed by the virtue of the Clarois. "A medal for civic merit," he repeated smilingly. He looked sideways at Jacques.

"That should not surprise you, von Brackner," said Jacques. "You must not forget that we are more Spanish than French in this neighborhood."

Mme Costellot hastened to remark that in spite of all that there were some refractory characters in Saint-Clar. For instance, the Comte de Balansun . . .

"Oh, the old gentleman!" exclaimed von Brackner. "He is very, very amusing. He makes me laugh a lot. He makes me think of—how do you call those little toys? Puppets, marionettes, *nicht*?"

Mme Costellot echoed with delight.

"A puppet, von Brackner! A solemn and pompous puppet!"

She related the "latest" about M. de Balansun.

"It was Berthe, Mme Delahaye's housekeeper, who told me about

this incident." She described how the Marshal's portrait was condemned to the dustbin by the formal orders of the Count. Von Brackner roared with laughter. The anecdote amused him tremendously.

"Tell us again, I beg you, Mme Costellot. How did he say, the old gentleman?"

"My girl, throw that into the dustbin," declaimed Mme Costellot, imitating M. de Balansun's haughty manner.

Tears of laughter were streaming down von Brackner's cheeks.

"Really, he said like that? Throw the Marshal into the dustbin? Poor Marshal!"

The company around the table smiled politely, though not without some embarrassment. M. Lardenne and his wife were not amused. But Mme Costellot had expected this reaction from von Brackner. "He is so broad minded, and he has such a sense of humor!" Albert too seemed to enjoy the story; he laughed almost as loudly as von Brackner.

"So M. de Balansun is one of our terrible enemies?" asked von Brackner, drying his tears of laughter.

"Terrible!" said Mme Costellot, eagerly adopting his jesting tone. "And his son is even more so."

M. Lardenne bent his head over his plate. Von Brackner suddenly became serious.

"I know," he said. "We know everything at the *Kommandatur*."

"Francis is only a youngster," said Jacques.

"Monsieur Jacques," retorted von Brackner, "with us, in the *Hitler Jugend*, there are youngsters of the same age who have not hesitated to kill, when the Fatherland demanded it."

A slight chill fell. Mme Lardenne seized the bottle of Burgundy and filled the glasses of von Brackner and G  lin.

They discussed the latest war news. The English . . .

"That reminds me," said Mme Costellot. "It seems that an English plane crashed in the Landes this evening."

"That is true," said von Brackner. "It went up in flames, ten kilometers from Dax."

"So that was it," exclaimed Jacques, addressing himself to G  lin. "You know, Albert, the smoke and the red glow we saw this evening—that was the English plane! We thought it was a forest fire."

"How curious," said G  lin.

He drank a glass of Burgundy.

"Did they find the crew?" he asked von Brackner.

"No, monsieur. The plane was burned to a crisp. They must have

died in the accident. Burned—burned alive,” he repeated in a tone of satisfaction.

“Probably so,” said Gélín.

“Of course,” said Jacques. “How would you expect them to get away? The plane burned to a crisp—”

They went to the drawing room, where coffee and liqueurs were served. Mme Costellot made von Brackner sit in the most comfortable chair. She was intoxicated with respect.

“Is this the first time you have come to these parts, monsieur?” von Brackner asked Gélín.

“Yes. I am going to Toulouse. Actually I should be in the train on my way there now. But I am very pleased to be here.”

“Good old Albert!” said Jacques, clapping him on the back. “I couldn’t believe my eyes when I saw you at the Splendide.”

“Same here!” cried Albert.

“It’s grand to see each other again, after three years. Plenty of things have happened, since we were at Saumur.”

Albert sighed.

Toward eleven o’clock, he said good night. Von Brackner clicked his heels again, under the ecstatic eyes of Mme Costellot. (She never tired of seeing von Brackner click his heels and bend double. The old Prussian nobility, you had to admit. So much style! So much chic!)

“I’ll take you up to your room,” Jacques said to Gélín.

On the threshold, he added, “We will have breakfast at nine o’clock tomorrow. You’ll have time to catch the train, it leaves at ten. What would you like for breakfast? Coffee or tea? Will you have an egg and some bacon?”

“This is true hospitality!” said Gélín. “I am sure that I would enjoy tea and a fried egg tremendously.”

The next morning he showed due appreciation of tea, bacon, and eggs. Jacques and he were alone in the dining room.

“Did you sleep well?” asked Jacques. “You look rather tired.”

“I slept very well.”

He poured himself out a second cup of tea. Jacques looked at him curiously. Then he lowered his eyes and said, after about a minute, in English, “How did you enjoy your dinner last night?”

Gélín was just lighting a cigarette. He smiled calmly and replied in the same language, “Oh, very much indeed. It was quite interesting, you know. I shall remember it.”

“I am sure you will,” said Jacques.

He drove him to the station in his car. They walked up and down the platform at a safe distance from the German sentry.

"Weren't you frightened last night?" asked Jacques.

"No," replied Gélín, with a surprised expression. "Why?"

Jacques bit his lip.

"I could have had you arrested. You were like a mouse in a trap," he said dryly. "Von Brackner is in the Secret Service."

"Oh, so he's a colleague," said Gélín. "You see, I am too."

He laughed his little, ironical laugh.

"Be honest, say you were frightened," Jacques said angrily. "You behaved very well at table, I admit, you've got guts. You were very sporting, I mean," he added, in English, and then reverted to his own language again. "But last night! Didn't it occur to you that I might turn you in, during the night?"

"No, it didn't, old boy. *Votre figure m'a inspiré tout de suite avec de la confiance. Je savais que vous n'étiez pas un—comment vous dites? Un salaud?* I mean, I knew you weren't a rat, you see."

"By the way," said Jacques, "try not to use English constructions. One says '*inspirer confiance*,' and not '*inspirer avec de la confiance*.' And in French, one does not say '*je vois*' all the time."

"Yes. I'm not used to it yet. I haven't spoken French, really spoken it, I mean, for five years. Besides, I intended to land in the desert of Lannemezan, and not in the desert of the Landes," he added with a broad smile. "In the desert of Lannemezan, it would not have mattered if I spoke French badly. The people there would have known who I am."

"I knew, too, yesterday evening," said Jacques. "I knew it after the first two minutes of conversation."

Gélín looked at him, his eyes sparkling with friendly mockery.

"I also guessed at once that you had guessed. That is why, you see, I trusted you."

"And when you saw von Brackner in my house and when you heard how my mother and my father-in-law talked, did you still trust me?" Jacques asked brutally.

"It was a very—savory situation. That's what one calls it in French, isn't it? Very savory. I found it quite thrilling."

"I am not a Gaullist," said Jacques. "I could have turned you in," he repeated obstinately.

"I'm sure you could," Gélín said simply.

Jacques clenched his teeth. They continued to walk up and down the platform.

"Costellot," the stranger said suddenly, "you have been very *chic*, very decent. Very decent, in your queer way. Thank you. When your country has been liberated, I will come to see you, with my superior officer. I will return to thank you."

"And to give me a medal for my patriotism?" Jacques interrupted, in an insolent tone. "I don't like the idea. Don't bother to come back to Saint-Clar."

The stranger smiled, not without gentle malice.

"It might be useful to you . . . and your family. You know what I mean?"

"Exactly," said Jacques. "I'm not looking for a safety exit. I don't want you to feel grateful."

The electric signal announced the arrival of the train.

"Why did you—spare me?" the stranger asked brusquely.

Jacques drew a deep breath. At last! He had been waiting for this question. Since yesterday, he had waited for it. This morning, he had trembled for fear it might not be asked.

"I wanted to see how you would behave. I wanted to see if you had guts. I spared you because I respect you," he said, with profound happiness.

"I see. And suppose I had not had guts—would you have turned me in?"

"No, but I would have had the satisfaction of despising you," said Jacques.

"You're a strange person," said the stranger.

After a moment of silence, he added, "Do you hope for a German victory?"

"No," said Jacques. "But I don't dread it either. And I would have spared a German, just as I spared you. . . . I won't get mixed up in all this foolishness," he ended.

The train was coming into the station.

"All the same, one has to choose a side, don't you think?" the stranger said gently.

Jacques did not answer. The stranger stared at him in silence.

"I rather like you," he said at last. "Allow me to introduce myself." Then he whispered, "David Lewis Horsman."

They shook hands. Horsman climbed onto the platform of the rail-

way car. He was still holding his briefcase under his arm. He now drew the package of cigarettes from it.

"Have another Abdullah?" he asked.

The train was about to start.

"I say, do you play golf?" said Horsman. "You must come and play at my place, after the war. There are excellent links near my village. It's in Sussex. I would be delighted if you would come."

Jacques smiled. A whistle rent the air. The train moved out of the station.

"He is nice, that friend of yours," said Mme Costellot. "And well brought up. Good family?"

"Very good," said Jacques. "I've had an invitation to go and play golf at their place, after the war."

"Play golf?"

"Yes. They live in Sussex."

"What?"

"In Sussex. In England."

"In England?"

"It's natural for an Englishman to live in England, isn't it?"

"An Englishman! Jacques, what are you talking about?"

"My friend David (his name's David) parachuted on to the Landes yesterday. A little accident. But he got away with a few scratches on his hands."

In the silence that followed there was a feeling that the house of Lardenne was going to explode.

"This is no joking matter, Jacques," said Mme Costellot, in a toneless voice. "Do you mean to say that you brought an English parachutist to dinner with us last night?"

"Hospitality is an ancient French tradition."

"Where has he gone?" stammered Mme Costellot.

"Somewhere into the bush, I imagine, to organize the *maquis* in the southwest."

M. Lardenne had listened to the conversation. He was deathly pale. Now he slowly raised both hands toward the ceiling and murmured in a stifled voice, "Jacques, Jacques, you might have brought us all before the firing squad!"

4.

"WHAT is the matter?" asked M. de Balansun. "What is the matter, my dear boy? You have been on vacation for a month and you have not yet come to see Hélène. She falls ill, she gives us all the most dreadful fright, she recovers, she needs distraction, exercise in the sunshine, affectionate attention. And our great friend, our dear old friend Gérard, the boon companion, has not yet crossed the threshold of the Balansun house. This is bad. Come on, tell me, what has happened? A slight misunderstanding, a little sentimental spat?" He turned toward Mme Delahaye: "My dear Cécile, I find these children most disconcerting. I will never be able to understand the new generation."

"I didn't want to risk bothering Hélène," said Gérard. "When you're not well, you don't want to see anyone."

"That is being too tactful, my friend. Our families are so closely linked that an interchange of visits are welcomed with joy—at least, so I hope," he hastened to add, "and I hope that I have never been looked upon here as a tiresome and importunate visitor."

"You know perfectly well that that has never been the case, dear friend," Mme Delahaye protested tenderly.

"And yet there is one person in this house who is not at all pleased when I show myself!"

"You mean Berthe?"

"It is you who named her!" cried the Count with affected grandiloquence. "I have fallen into disgrace with your faithful servant! Have I unwittingly hurt her feelings? Have I been unkind without knowing it? And yet I have the impression that I have always been most polite with her, with the necessary reserves, of course. My conscience is as clear as the light of day. But just the same, dear friend, your Abigail is far from showing me the cordiality she used to show me."

"Berthe has changed strangely these last few months," said Mme Delahaye, in a plaintive tone. "I have even considered parting with her; it may be that I shall be forced to do so, though not without much regret."

"She's mad," said Gérard. "I advised you long ago to give her her notice."

"Surely you are not unaware, my dear Gérard," said the Count, "that this native of the Landes enjoys the favors of the Evil One, who

visits her bed at night with conjugal regularity. Would you have thought that the Prince of Darkness was addicted to such amours?"

Mme Delahaye shook her head.

"You should not joke about these things, Léon," she murmured.

"Forgive me, Cécile, forgive me," said the Count. He rolled his eyes in a burlesque imitation of repentance. "My dear boy, your *maman* moves with the greatest of ease in the world of larvae and ectoplasm; and she has actually proved to me that Berthe is the victim of a—of an—"

He snapped his fingers like someone who cannot recall a word.

"Of an incubus," Gérard said with a smile. "Yes, I know, M. de Balansun."

"An incubus, that's it!" the Count cried. "I can never remember that extraordinary word. Who would think, looking at your mother's sweet candid face, that her little brain could harbor such frightful apparitions?"

"Léon, do not make fun of me," said Mme Delahaye. "You must not provide my little Gérard with any more weapons against me: he too scolds me for taking an interest in the occult sciences."

The little Gérard—who was actually only six feet high—rose to his feet.

"I prefer to hear you talk about music," he said, "but never say I scold you, whatever you do. I am a dutiful son, respectful and affectionate!"

"That's true, my darling," said Mme Delahaye.

Gérard bent down to her and kissed her on the forehead. She took the young man's face between her hands. M. de Balansun watched the scene with fond emotion.

"Are you going for a little walk?" Mme Delahaye asked. "Don't be late for dinner."

"Provided dinner is ready at the usual time," Gérard said laughingly. "Berthe has gone out, I take it?"

"I believe she has gone out to do some shopping."

"And to spread the Gospel of Love in Saint-Clar. You are far too indulgent with her, *maman*! Deep down, you are terrified of her. Admit it!"

Mme Delahaye blushed.

"He's right," said the Count. "Berthe affects you too much, my poor Cécile. You should send her back to her native Landes and find a de-

cent little servant girl whose endocrine glands function in a more normal manner. Your big son and I will see to it."

"That's a bargain, M. de Balansun," said Gérard, shaking hands with the old gentleman. "I will come to see you tomorrow. Forgive me my excess of tact. I hope Hélène will not mind."

"She'll be delighted to see you, delighted, I'm sure. I will tell her you are coming."

He was slightly nervous as he rang the bell at the Balansuns' house. How would Hélène receive him? He had not seen her again since that Sunday in April when she had treated him so coldly and unkindly. Yet the thing he could not forgive her was what he himself had said to her as he left. Those brutal and stupid words, so characteristic of injured vanity, so terribly second rate! He had regretted them for weeks. "I must always be regretting something, some boner, some stupidity, some vulgarity." How would Hélène receive him? And yet he was longing to see her. Perhaps it was just curiosity. And some vestiges of affection as well. I believe I am still fond of her, in spite of everything, he thought.

Francis came to open the door. Gérard exclaimed: "How you have grown!" The schoolboy was a young man now. "I expected to find a little boy in short pants." He was like a younger Hélène—the same open, smooth face, the same straight look, and the straight mouth of "those who have never lied." But there was more serenity in his eyes, a kind of peace. Suddenly Gérard had an indefinable, fugitive impression that Francis would not survive his adolescence. "Those whom the gods love." Then the impression vanished before Gérard had even arrested it in his thoughts. Francis was standing before him, Hélène's brother, the little Francis he had always known—grown into a young man. "Oh, I heard you graduated from school with high honors. That's wonderful, kid. Congratulations!" Francis dismissed the matter with a shrug of his shoulders. Gérard did not know what to say now. He was always embarrassed when he found himself with very young people, the youngsters who had grown up during the war.

The Louis XVI drawing room, the Venetian mirror, the festoons and the moldings, the portrait of the ancestor who had lived under Louis-Philippe. The room was as it had always been, nothing had changed. When I was eighteen, I used to come here sometimes to tea. Holidays. Hélène wore a white skirt and a white sweater. Her sunburned arms,

her laughter like a spurt of foam—my Amazon. And I was jealous of Jacques Costellot, because he played tennis better than I did, and was more intelligent, more cultured, handsomer, and richer. But that great wave of happiness that came over me. It was a September evening in 1922, on the road to Dax, the air was sweet with the scent of the vineyards and the pines; there was a deep-red sunset and the swallows were screeching and whirling round in the sky—and the wave of happiness when H  l  ne said, "Jacques Costellot is a snob. Actually I don't like him a bit. He is selfish and trivial, like all the rich." Then I thanked God because I was poor and not very clever and eighteen years old.

"What will you do in October, Francis?"

Francis said that until the end of the war he would work with M. de Balansun at the office and read for his bar exams. After the war, when everything had gone back to normal, he hoped to train for the Colonial Service. He had always dreamed of a post in French East Africa. Timbuktu. Didn't that name excite G  rard, too? Timbuktu—

"You will be a builder of towns, Francis, a pioneer like Lyautey."

Yes, he thought to himself, Francis is a good guy. Like Lavoncourt, clean, inwardly and outwardly. If he became an officer, his men would adore him. He was a Boy Scout. He was probably mad about outdoor sports and anything mechanical. I have nothing in common with him.

There was a step on the stairs. "This is H  l  ne." The door opened. G  rard got up. She was wearing a white skirt and a white sweater. She was thinner, her cheeks were slightly hollow, and she wore no make-up. Fatigue had made her beauty more ethereal. There was in her a kind of bruised sweetness. He held out his hand. His voice sounded a little husky despite its cordial tone, "I was expecting to find you on a chaise longue, pale and emaciated, writing your diary, like Marie Baskirtsheff. You have never looked so well!"

Francis had disappeared. He was discretion personified. They sat down. They talked, without paying much attention to what they were saying. (Nothing but commonplaces: nervous depression, fatigue. "Calcium injections, yes, they help a lot.") They studied each other with shy curiosity. G  rard dropped his eyes.

"I have regretted the stupid thing that—well, what I said when I left, the last time we met. I did not mean a single word of it, of course."

"I know. I, too, regretted having been so—unsympathetic. I was not feeling very happy at that particular time."

Silence. They ventured to look at each other again.

"And now, are you happier?"

"I am feeling more rested, more relaxed. I have also found a little more courage."

She leaned against the back of the divan. Her breasts were hardly defined under the white jersey. An artery pulsed where her neck joined the shoulder. Her hand was resting against the worn velvet of the couch, a hand with long, supple, almost transparent fingers.

Francis came back into the room and sat down on the carpet opposite to them. He looked pleased at seeing them together again.

"Gérard, I wanted to ask you. May I come and play tennis at your place one of these days?"

"Of course, you little idiot. There was no need to ask me. You should have come, just like that."

"Thank you. I haven't played for such a long time!"

"Have you got a partner—another boy?"

"No, a girl," interrupted Hélène laughingly, "and a very pretty one too. He has good taste, our Francis."

"Do I know her?" asked Gérard.

"Of course you do—little Marie-Anne Lemaire."

Gérard nodded to express his admiration.

"She is very charming."

Francis would have liked to sink through the floor. Yet actually he felt very proud. He knew that Gérard and Hélène were joking in a nice way. Still, he hoped it would not go on too long. Fortunately, they were tactful and didn't labor the point.

"You know," said Gérard, "you'll find the court in awful condition. It has not been weeded this year."

"Gérard," Hélène said, "do you know, all of a sudden I feel I'd love a game of tennis."

Francis ran to fetch the rackets. They went out into the street trembling with light and heat. Francis was wearing linen shorts and sandals. Gérard thought to himself, "What a charming trio we make! like a novel by Delly or the colored paper jacket of a book in the collection Stella— Young smart set— Careful education, central heating, as the prospectus of a boarding school at Pau used to say. But we're nice, in spite of it all." He remembered how in the old days, when Hélène was particularly haughty and "*grande dame*," he used to tease her by reciting François Coppée's poem: "*Irène de Grandfief, la noble et pure enfant*."

But in what year were they living? 1943? 1932? Saint-Clar always had the same look. The *Place de la Mairie*, scorched by the sun and

deserted at this hour. The newspaper vendor, asleep in front of her kiosk, a straw hat pulled down over her nose. She had the same mustache she'd had ten years ago. That oxcart squeaking along the road in the direction of the Gave was surely the same cart that was used to carry pebbles from the Gave every holiday. The oxen would stand in water up to their bellies. And over there, on the hill dominating the town, the same umbrella pine that looked rather incongruous and absurd in this corner of Béarn, with its suggestion of the Mediterranean. 1932. Hélène wears a white skirt and Francis is a little boy in shorts. We are going to play tennis. Ah, but over there a green uniform was coming out of the café. A green uniform that is even more incongruous in Saint-Clar than the umbrella pine on the hill. We are in 1943. I am twenty-nine.

A woman passed them on the bridge, a woman in a red dress with a pattern of large white flowers, a very low-cut neck, and no sleeves. The woman had a ravaged and yet splendid face, dark brooding eyes, and a black mane of hair. Her hips swayed as she walked. As she passed them, she gave Hélène a look, a queer, heavy, significant look, accompanied by the ghost of a smile and a slight nod of the head in a very mundane way. A slight flush rose to Hélène's cheeks.

"Do you know her?" whispered Francis. "Why did she nod to you?"

"I don't know," said Hélène. "She must have been greeting you."

She had spoken in an expressionless voice. She was surprised at how well she could act indifferent.

"Yes, probably," Francis replied.

"Isn't that young Philippe's mother?" asked Gérard. "By the way, what's happened to him?"

Hélène trembled that he would go on and ask, "Do you still see a lot of him?" It might easily happen, he was so apt to put his foot in it. It would be so embarrassing, because of Francis. Naturally Francis and the family knew nothing about it. They had no idea that Hélène had seen Philippe often this year. She interrupted Gérard vivaciously.

"Why do you ask me? I don't know anything about it." Then she added rapidly, leaning over the parapet, "Look at the Gave, how green it is today."

The boys admired the Gave. Hélène breathed again. Francis had noticed nothing. He had not heard Gérard's question, he had not paid attention to it. They had safely passed over that danger spot. Gérard had not noticed anything either. Probably he had only thought, "The new craze didn't last long: that was to be expected." She glanced at his

tall silhouette leaning over the parapet. He was really rather naïve.

When they arrived at the tennis court, she too had an almost hallucinatory impression of having been projected back into the past, ten years back. While Gérard and Francis were winding up the net—the pulley squeaked in the dry burning air—she tore off a bamboo leaf from the hedge and began to chew it. The heat made her feel slightly dizzy; she was blinded by the fierce light of the sun. She chewed the dry leaf. A small boy emerges out from the bamboos like a young wild animal. He has tousled black hair, his long, narrow eyes gleam. *Give it to me, M'dame!* In her hand she holds a little gray ball, velvety, with a yellow beak and blood among its feathers. *Give it to me, M'dame!* Her fingers close over the bird. *Do you understand what a horrid thing you have done?* He stamps his foot, self-willed and furious. *Merdel! Give it to me. I want it!* His knees are covered with scars. His open shirt reveals his golden torso. His eyes flash with anger like those of a wolf. The line of his jaw and the nape of his neck. *You want it too!* She throws the bird over the hedge, he breaks his way through the rustling bamboos like an animal in the jungle. *That's not true!* Like an animal—and Francis hides his head against her arms. He wants to cry, because of the blood on the little bird, because of the pathetic little yellow beak open among the feathers. *It's not true? Then why did you hide the photo this evening?* It is hot, so hot. In the room— His golden torso, bare— *Yes, I too. I want you, I too, I—* That blinding light. *Yes, I too—*

"Hélène!" cried Gérard.

He rushed to her side. She was holding her hand to her forehead, her face ashen. No, no, it's nothing. She pushed him away. The heat. She had not been out for several days. The heat had made her feel dizzy. Gérard made her sit down on a little seat in the shade. It is nothing. It will be over in five minutes.

He was sitting on the grass at her feet. Francis had gone to get a glass of fresh water from the kitchen. In 1932—the day he had made up his mind at last and taken his courage in both hands. He had tried to speak without stuttering. He had told her he loved her, just like that, brutally, without warning. Like a desperate man who throws himself into the water . . . (It was slightly ridiculous. He had swallowed audibly. He was conscious of his Adam's apple, which was rather too prominent and bobbed up and down. Why had God afflicted man with an Adam's apple?) She did not smile. (As today, she was wearing a white skirt. Her sunburned arms lay on the back of the bench, outlining her breasts. Her hair flowed over her shoulders. Today, it was

gathered up in a net.) She did not smile. She behaved very well, as well as anyone could in such a situation, when an old playmate, a childhood friend, almost, throws it in your face that he loves you, just like that, without any preparation, with a sound of swallowing and an Adam's apple bobbing up and down. She answered with infinite gentleness that she had already known, that she was terribly sorry. Couldn't they just be friends, the best of friends? Then the sky had grown dark for Gérard. He had thought that he might as well die. He was eighteen. But he had not died. There had been more holidays, more games of tennis. They had come to terms, little by little. In the end, you come to terms with everything.

Francis came back, carrying a glass of water. Then they began to play. The ball sounded in the dry air. Through the net, Gérard could see Hélène's white skirt bounding round her knees. My Amazon. She still played well. She still had that boyish knack of serving a low ball, skimming the net. Gérard was getting slightly out of breath, the sweat was streaming down his forehead. In 1943—I am twenty-nine. The arteries are hardening, the heart is weaker.

When the game was over, they went into the house. Mme Delahaye gave Hélène a warm welcome. She embraced her and kissed her, calling her "my big girl" Berthe served tea. The French windows in the drawing room were wide open. The bees hummed in the bush of passionflowers. Gérard put a record on the victrola. He had chosen it carefully: the Concerto in E major, one of Hélène's favorite pieces, the concerto they had listened to together in November. But at the first bars, she started up. She asked Gérard to "put on something else." She suggested a dance. The concerto stopped suddenly, and in its place, the music of an old foxtrot played on the saxophone. The record dated back ten years, from the time when Gérard was passionately fond of jazz. They danced together. Francis watched them, smoking a Gauloise. Francis was a young man now. He had his tobacco ration. He smoked less for the pleasure it gave him than to appear grown up. And chiefly because M. de Balansun had formally forbidden his family to use the "*poudre à Nicot.*"

They danced together. They moved slowly, turned like intertwined sea anemone floating on a lazy swell. How wonderful a slow foxtrot can be when you are in love with your partner and she's as supple as sea anemone and forgets herself, gives herself to you, effortlessly. He breathed the perfume of her arms, of her hair. His right hand supported her flexible body. Their steps interlaced with unconscious sure-

ness. Gérard closed his eyes. At the bottom of the sea, softly cradled by a slow swell, two intertwined anemones floated in a dark ecstasy. Time had ceased to exist.

As soon as they sat down to tea M. de Balansun appeared. Francis rapidly put out his cigarette and hid it. M. de Balansun had torn himself away for a minute from his harassing obligations to pay his daily call on the "good friend" and to inquire how Hélène was feeling. He darted around, cleared his throat and raised his voice in sudden bursts. He was jovial, youthful, playful, like a winsome bumblebee. He dived into his old stock of cheerful little stories. He had a kind word for everybody. He was so glad that Hélène had won a game of tennis: a good sign, an excellent sign! The Balansun vitality was not dead. Oh, come, that nervous depression was a false alarm! The Balansuns were a healthy race. The Count accepted a cup of tea—but he would have to drink it very quickly, for urgent papers awaited him at the office. A case about a party wall, where his arbitration was required and there was need of his judicious advice. Mme Delahaye expressed her pity for the man of affairs, crushed by the weight of his manifold obligations. With great simplicity, the Count agreed that a profession like his demanded a very specially organized brain. Yet his work left him time enough to add the finishing touches to his novelized biography of Gaston le Roux, that Béarnais prince whose far-flung activities could stand comparison with those of a Lorenzo de' Medici. M. de Balansun now had the sad task of describing the death of Gaston le Roux, whose premature decease, on January 12, 1366, was due to a chill. With him, the glories of the chronicles of the Béarn came to an end. But let no one be mistaken: the Béarnais had not lost their courage, their rebellious spirit, their thirst for independence. The twentieth century had seen the fiery reawakening of the bucolic province. The Nazi boot had caused the blossoms of heroism to sprout between the paving stones of Saint-Clar. M. de Balansun could say no more. Let them only wait for the end of the war and then they would see how certain Clarois had fought against the Teuton tyrant!

Francis kept his eyes obstinately fixed on the toes of his sandals. Mme Delahaye, who had understood the Count's allusions, offered the young man a jam sandwich—a symbolic gesture of gratitude. Gérard wondered what the mystery might be. When the Count had taken his leave, he put the question to Mme Delahaye, who did not know what to say. She felt obliged to observe the secrecy the Count had imposed on her. Finally it was Hélène who enlightened Gérard in a few words. She told

him that the Count was very proud of Francis, who was an active Gaulist. That was all. For the second time that day, Francis wished he were a mouse and could hide in a hole in the floorboards. Gérard looked at him curiously, with a kind of silent admiration. He was remembering a little incident which had not impressed him much at the time: it went back to the end of 1940, when Francis was at school, a boy of fifteen. One day, the professor of German—a layman from Alsace—had begun the lesson with a vibrant eulogy of the Marshal. He advised his pupils to maintain absolute obedience to the great soldier. He worked himself up, he excoriated the Red extremists who lent a friendly ear to the calls from London. Finally, he exclaimed, "We have lost the war! We must pay for it!" The class was deeply impressed. At that moment, Francis rose to his feet, to the amazement of everybody (for he was a docile pupil, a pattern of good behavior). He was scarlet, but he looked the professor straight in the face and said coldly, "It is you and the men of your age who have lost the war. It has nothing to do with us." Professorial thunders burst over his head. He was reported to the headmaster. His punishment consisted of detention on three successive days for "insolence toward a professor," a bad mark for behavior and being struck off the honor roll for that month. When M. de Balansun heard about it, he thought he would lose his reason. He asked himself what kind of a serpent he had nourished in his bosom. He reprimanded his son severely and addressed him as "sir" for three days running. But two weeks later, he was telling the story to everybody in the town. Fundamentally, when he had thought it over, he was delighted. The ancient pride of the Balansuns had awakened in his son, in the midst of the disarray of the debacle, of the Armistice. Besides, the Count believed that Francis was right. It was not the youths under twenty who had lost the war. "Defeat," as M. de Balansun was later to say bitterly, "defeat is the present that we have given to our sons for their coming of age!"

Gérard now remembered that little incident. At the time, he had paid no attention, merely thought, "Schoolboy foolishness, chauvinism of a boy scout—" But now he was not so sure that it had been either chauvinism or foolishness. He looked at the boy, so clean and honest looking, with his bare legs, his smooth face, his eyes as calm and luminous as water. He felt embarrassed. He felt humble and second rate, compared to Francis. Mme Delahaye invited Hélène to come and admire her rosebushes. The ladies went out and the two young men remained alone.

"How long have you been busy with all this, Francis?" Gérard murmured, after a short silence.

"Since about October last."

"How did you get into this? Excuse me, perhaps I am asking too many questions. I suppose you are bound to secrecy."

"How did I get mixed up in this? By chance. I got someone over the line."

"I understand. But did you want to do this kind of work? Did you know it existed?"

"I knew what everybody knows. That is to say, very little indeed." He laughed. "Of course, I don't know much more now. You carry out your orders in a small sector. You don't know the names, or the real names, of the people you meet." He added modestly: "Besides, I am only a small unimportant cog. What I do isn't very difficult."

"You did not hesitate before you agreed?"

Francis laughed again; the question seemed to amuse him.

"No one asked me to sign a contract, you know! The man I helped to cross the line gave me a message for another man. The other gave me another job somewhere else. And so it went. It's very simple really. Papa makes a big fuss and mystery about it. You know what he's like; he dramatizes everything. But actually there's nothing in it, I assure you."

Gérard was thoughtful. He remembered his interview with Pierre last winter: his interminable confession, his soul-searchings, his scruples . . . Shall I agree? Shall I not agree? Will the good Gérard become a hero or remain a despicable person? To join—or not to join? The lame imitation of Hamlet, the trifle marking time. Francis did not want to be a hero. The idea had never occurred to him. Francis had not hesitated, he had not made such a fuss about it. He considered it all quite simple, nothing much to it. He was of a different breed entirely, not confused by problems, not given to wallowing in introspective soliloquies. The boys of his age were all like him. For good or evil, they sounded a clear note. They were a metal without alloy. They forged straight ahead, without hesitating, without flinching—but also without thinking. They frighten me a little, Gérard said to himself. I do not understand them. Whether they are good or bad, they seem equally inhuman to me. We come from the same country, we speak the same language, and yet between them and me, between them and my contemporaries, there is a large abyss. They live quite naturally in a world that disconcerts us, crushes us, or rejects us.

But how would Francis label my hesitations, my scruples, that inner "complexity" of which I used to be so naïvely proud, and which we had been taught to look upon with pride? I suppose he would say it was just "funk."

He wanted to keep on talking to Francis, to tell him that he admired him and also envied him. But he didn't dare. He was not quite sure that Francis would understand; he was afraid that he might smile. So he had to content himself with a gentle, well-meaning tone, an "elder brother" tone, and said, "You will be careful, Francis, won't you? I would be very sorry if you got yourself into trouble; everybody would be very sorry. Take good care of yourself. Nothing must happen to you, young fellow."

5.

WHEN Friedrich Rustiger came into Mme Delahaye's drawing room that evening, he seemed worried. After they had exchanged common-places for a few minutes, the German begged Mme Delahaye to put on a record: the Adagio of the symphony *In Exitu*. They listened in silence. When it was over, Rustiger said, "Perhaps this is the last time I will hear this music. I have to leave tonight."

"Where are you going?" asked Mme Delahaye, amazed.

He got up and made a vague gesture.

"Almost certainly to Russia," he said. "They no longer want me here at the *Kommandatur*." He laughed a sad little laugh. "I can tell you, now. My comrades don't care much for me. They think I am too much of—a musician, and not enough of a soldier. So they are sending me to Russia, to teach me to place the Reich above everything."

Gérard looked at him curiously. Mme Delahaye clasped her hands.

"Besides, there's something else," said Rustiger. "They have discovered that my blood is not quite Aryan, do you understand? It seems I have a Jewish grandmother."

He shook his head pensively.

"Germany is killing herself by her own stupidity," he said.

Gérard was surprised; this was the first time he had heard him express such sentiments.

"I am deeply grieved for your sake," said Cécile.

And she really looked deeply grieved. Rustiger made a vague movement in her direction.

"No, you mustn't," he said. "It is not important."

He looked at his watch.

"I must go and pack my things. Could Berthe come and help me?"

He left the room. Gérard and his mother were silent. Then Mme Delahaye murmured, "The poor young man!"

Twenty minutes later, he came down carrying his suitcases. Before going into the drawing room, he handed Berthe three hundred-franc notes. She took them without a word. He tapped at the door and went in. Berthe closed the door behind him, crouched down, and glued her eye to the keyhole.

"Won't you have a cup of tea?" asked Mme Delahaye.

"I'm afraid I won't have time," he said. "I must be at the *Kommandatur* at eight o'clock. Von Brackner does not like to be kept waiting."

Mme Delahaye leaned toward Gérard and whispered, "Go and get a bottle of Jurançon from the cellar." Gérard got up and left the room.

"Von Brackner is a real Nazi," Rustiger continued. "He's the one who brought it up, you know, about my Jewish grandmother. You should be very careful with him. He knows everything that goes on in Saint-Clar. I don't know how he manages to find it all out."

Gérard returned, carrying the bottle wrapped up in paper. He handed it to his mother.

"You must put that in your suitcase," she said. "It's a little wine. You must drink it in the train and think of Saint-Clar." He blushed and stammered his thanks. Gérard turned his head away. The sight of a man overcome by emotion was as unpleasant to him as an indecent act.

"You have always been very good to me," Rustiger said. "And yet I am your enemy and I came to—to be a burden to you in your house."

"I would not have been so good to von Brackner, believe me," said Mme Delahaye. And a touching gleam of ferocity flashed in her short-sighted eyes.

Rustiger smiled.

"I know," he said. "Now I must go. I want to ask you a favor—if your big son will allow me," he added humbly, glancing at Gérard. "Will you please let me kiss you."

Gérard still had his head turned away.

"Yes, certainly," he said, with an effort.

Rustiger bent over the old lady. She kissed him on both cheeks and then sniffed helplessly.

Rustiger straightened up again. He was looking into space.

"Almost my whole family perished in Hamburg," he said in a far-away voice. "Killed in a raid—my wife and my little boy—three months ago. So it does not really matter that I am going to Russia."

"You will come back after the war," Mme Delahaye said haltingly. "You must come back to see us."

He smiled at her tenderly.

"One can always hope," he said. "Yes, I will come back—if Germans have the right to return to victorious France. I would be happy. There will be no more von Brackners, no more *Kommandaturs*."

He made a step toward Gérard and held out his hand. The latter hesitated for a fraction of a second. Then, getting up, he clasped the proffered hand.

"Good-by. Good luck," said Rustiger.

He took his suitcases.

"Don't accompany me outside," he said. "It's better not; your neighbors are sitting out front. The evening is cool. Good-by. Thank you again."

"*Au revoir*," murmured Mme Delahaye.

He went out. Berthe left her observation post and returned to the kitchen.

6.

TOWARD the middle of September, Hélène left again for Paris.

Her plan for staying in Saint-Clar had not been practicable. Where could you find work in this town, and what kind of work? She could not live off her family—that she refused to even consider. And aside from the material difficulties, how could she have stood the torture of her family's trusting solicitude, of having to lie every minute of the day, of hearing them talk of Jean and his imminent return? She returned to Paris. She knew that as soon as she arrived she would write to Philippe. She would beg him to come to her, just once more. He would come. And once again, between the evening and the dawn, there would be a quieting of all anxiety, an unfurling of wave upon wave of a black delight. Utter peace, nameless, featureless—

She promised to come home again at Christmas, however difficult the journey might be. Francis took her to the station. Mme de Balansun, in spite of Hélène's protests, had filled her cases with provisions and preserves. As the train was leaving, Francis slipped a package of cigarettes

into the pocket of her coat; they were Turkish ones, which he had obtained as a great favor by making sheeps' eyes at the tobacconist, a robust and sentimental lady in her forties, who had a soft spot for "Monsieur Francis."

The hill above the town assumed the brown and russet tints of autumn. It was a marvelous autumn, day after day a riot of sunshine. People were still bathing in the swimming pools. Francis felt rather sad after H  l  ne's departure, but he cheered himself by spending much of his time with his little friend Marie-Anne. They bathed together. One afternoon, after their swim, they went for a long country walk. They stole apples and picked blackberries. They sat down on the grass on the bank of a stream, out of sight of passers-by. Francis was gallant, but discreetly so: he was too fond of Marie-Anne to risk startling her. Besides, they considered themselves engaged. He kissed her hands over and over again. Then, blushing a little, he suggested, "Shall we kiss as they do in the movies?"

For, from time to time, Marie-Anne permitted a great liberty, the kiss-like-in-the-movies, that is to say, on the mouth. These daring adventures to the frontiers of passion were a rare privilege, accorded with wise parsimony. Marie-Anne had once said, "We're not doing wrong, as we are engaged. But it is better to wait. Will you promise, Francis?" Francis had promised, devoutly.

He looked upon Marie-Anne as a very innocent little girl, which she actually was; he considered himself infinitely more informed than she was, riper and more mature; a young man with a great deal of experience. The formula: "a-kiss-like-in-the-movies," which Marie-Anne had invented, amused him by its puerility. Nevertheless, he had entered into the game and respected the rules, for the young girl filled him with protective tenderness, an actually adult tenderness.

They kissed, awkwardly and a little shyly. Marie-Anne's lips tasted of the blackberries with which they were stained. Francis drew back first: it was terrible, terrible. Agreeable, certainly but what a state it put him in! He was afraid Marie-Anne might notice and take him for a lewd satyr. Really, love was a queer thing! It is strange, thought Francis, that those things can be mixed up with tenderness and even with respect. Yes, inextricably mixed up. But since God willed it so, it was surely all right. Francis sometimes wondered whether Marie-Anne wanted him in the same way as he wanted her. In the same terrible way. She was hardly seventeen, and she was such a little girl, so sweet and touching, so pretty! But when they were married—a little older and

married—there would no longer be any need to feel ashamed. They would be able to love each other completely and lie pressed against each other, without shame.

Marie-Anne laid her head on Francis' shoulder. He passed his arm round her waist. She was wearing a little sleeveless blue frock with white dots. Her bare, golden-brown legs were folded back under her. Francis was wearing linen shorts and a white shirt. He stroked Marie-Anne's knees with the tips of his fingers. She took his hand and laid her lips on its palm.

"Your hands are smoother than they used to be," she remarked.

"I take care of them," said Francis. "For your sake. Every evening I rub them with Hyalomiel. Every evening."

"Hyalomiel?"

"Yes. A lady told me about it."

"A lady?" Marie-Anne asked, in alarm.

Francis laughed softly and squeezed the young girl's waist tight.

"You needn't worry," he said. "She might be your mother. And she is not very beautiful—"

Marie-Anne frowned and appeared to ponder.

"Tell me, Francis," she said, "I've heard the girls at my school talk. They say men cannot remain faithful to their wives. Is that true?"

"What an ideal!" said Francis. "They're fools, the girls at your school. If a man loves his wife, he remains faithful to her," he affirmed peremptorily.

He raised the young girl's face to him, and bending over her, brushed her cheeks, her eyelids, and her lips with gentle kisses. In her turn, she took the boy's face between her hands and returned his kisses.

"All the girls at school are jealous of me," she murmured, "because you are the handsomest boy in Saint-Clar."

The days were growing shorter. The waters of the Gave, swollen by the first torrential rains of autumn, turned yellow and swirled round the rocks. The umbrella pine, veiled by the mist, looked more and more incongruous on its hill: a lovely stranger who could not become acclimatized. Flights of wood pigeons flew over Saint-Clar: they had been left in peace for five years. The west wind swept the dead leaves along the streets. Then the clouds parted and the sun shone again with royal prodigality. The scent of ripe grapes floated in the air. Country children sold enormous yellow and brown mushrooms strung up on willow branches.

These days reminded Gérard of going back to school in years gone by: the smell of new books, the smooth feel of satinette smocks, black and shining with austerity. Every morning, he had walked with Héléne, whose school was in the same street. Héléne wore her navy-blue schoolgirl's uniform and a funny little round hat. During October, those morning walks were delightful; the air was sharp without being cold, the sun's rays fell obliquely and caressed the face. Gérard deployed the cunning of a Sioux Indian to avoid a meeting with his rival, Jacques Costellot, the dandy of the college. Francis trotted beside Héléne, his hand in his big sister's.

But when they came out of school, it wasn't possible to avoid Jacques, as he and Gérard left at the same time. So they would walk home together, Héléne between the two boys. And Jacques was so brilliant that Gérard no longer knew what to say and had to be content to listen, walking along in sulky silence. Jacques Costellot would go out of his way to shine in conversation and even to flirt with Héléne, because he knew that it hurt Gérard. There were moments when Gérard could have gladly strangled him. Jacques had "everything on his side," as everyone admitted in Saint-Clar: intelligence, elegance, good looks, and far more money than Gérard. All the girls in the town admired him and showed off when he was near. (All, except Héléne. Héléne never showed off for anybody.) Yet, as though this were not enough, he had to hurt his friends, which he could do with great skill. He liked that game; not out of meanness, certainly, but rather because he was bored, and also, perhaps, because he had a perverse and slightly cruel side to him.

And yet Gérard was aware that Jacques did not love Héléne. Above all, he knew that he would never marry her; Jacques would only marry a rich girl. Love in a cottage did not fit into his scheme of life.

Everything reminded Gérard of his adolescence with Héléne. Every stone in Saint-Clar, every corner, every object in the house, would awaken a memory. The picture in the hall—a copy after Flandin—showing a naked youth seated on a rock looking toward the sea, clasping his knees with his arms, and resting his head on them: Héléne had admired that picture very much, to Gérard's amazement, for he considered it rather academic. "It is flat," he had said, "it's nothing but an outline, a contour—sunshine and light should flow over the body of that youth. Look, it is lifeless, flat as a pancake." But she did not listen. She seemed fascinated by the picture and murmured in a kind of ecstasy, "The beauty of that body, the youthfulness of it." "Good," Gérard re-

plied, "it is beautiful, I agree. But a photograph would give you the same emotion—or the living model. But you must admit that, as a work of art, as a painting, it has nothing more to it than a carefully executed drawing." "Gérard," she had said gently, her eyes still fixed on the picture, "I don't give two hoots for art when I look at that." At times she was funny, Hélène. Her taste was not impeccable.

Those books in the library, they were all presents from Hélène. A book for every birthday. (But this year she had forgotten!) He glanced at the titles. A volume of Apollinaire, one of Bergson (only a few pages of that had been cut), a Daniel-Rops—that was typical of Hélène in 1932, the Daniel-Rops. A Gide, but it was *la Porte Étroite*, the respectable Gide, the vintage suitable for sacramental wine. And finally, the inevitable Péguy: that was the scoutmistress side of Hélène. "*Heureux ceux qui sont morts . . . Heureux les épis mûrs. . .*" Actually, she had only made a good choice once—with *Alcools*. Dear Amazon!

The piano—sometimes she played a prelude and fugue that she liked very much. Gérard's father, who was pruning the roses in the garden, would come to the window. His torso of a kindly giant and his fine, furrowed face silhouetted against the square of blue sky. Clippers in hand, he would beat time discreetly, marking the rhythm by wagging his head, and make a painful grimace, always at the same note, exclaiming, "On the D, my child! Hold the chord longer! The whole weight of the prelude is in that chord!" Obediently, she played it again. M. Delahaye, his shears poised in the air, waited for the D with an anguished expression, like a man expecting a catastrophe. Then he relaxed and smiled: the dangerous rocks had successfully been passed. Johann Sebastian had not been betrayed.

The little bench on the tennis court—Hélène. The white and red tablecloth and the little stoneware plates in the Basque style—Hélène: the holiday teas, consisting of bread and butter with honey, after a game of tennis. The narrow road, steep and ancient, that led to the college and the girls' school: always Hélène. Their adolescence that would never come back, the vanished freshness, the lost paradise, a very commonplace and humble little paradise, but lost, irrecoverably. There would never be any more holidays, the sun of past holidays had sunk in the depth of eternity like a dead planet: the world of ten years ago had disappeared in a vast cataclysm. Today a new world was being prepared in the darkness of the war years, a new world whose embryonic features were slowly crystalizing. A world in which Francis and the children of his age would go straight ahead, without hesitation,

their faces equally untroubled in good and evil. But it would no longer be the world of Gérard and Hélène. They had passed beyond the time when they could choose, the time when they could create. For them the die had been cast. All that was left to them was to survive themselves, from now on.

7.

AND THE little town of Saint-Clar, that tiny Arcady that had slumbered for centuries on the banks of the Gave, even Saint-Clar would not emerge unscathed from the war. Already certain changes were evident. In four years the town had developed more rapidly than in the last hundred. At last it had become directly involved in the universal history of the time. Countless strangers passed through it, officially or otherwise (on certain days, the little inn beyond the demarcation line, on the road to Pau, resembled a caravansary where every language was spoken). The radio and the movies made Saint-Clar vibrate to the rhythm of the world. From now on, it could no longer withdraw into itself; its fate was linked to that of the entire planet, and it had become vaguely conscious of the fact. The outside world, with all its new trends and crazes, unfolded over the town. The inhabitants traveled a great deal. The young people, smart and wide awake, were no longer different from those of the metropolis. The adjective "provincial" could no longer be applied to them. Like America, England, or Germany, France would become a country without provinces. Soon the comparison of extremes Paris-Landerneau would be nothing but a literary convention, without the slightest relation to reality. The Parisians who came to get provisions in Saint-Clar in summer honestly believed they would discover a little world apart, created by Balzac. They were very disappointed: the only specifically regional element left in the town was the accent.

Gérard was contemplating the town from the foot of Gaston de Roux's ruined castle on the hill. The flag bearing the swastika flew above the *Kommandatur*, a strange banner to find in this corner of Béarn. The city lay there peacefully, with its gray and rose-red roofs. But beneath its somnolent appearance, it was living in the midst of a silent, stifled drama, like all the other towns of France, like all the other territories of Europe engulfed by the night of enemy occupation and war. Yet this night of the Occupation, this night whose end was so

desperately slow in coming, was pierced by a pitiless light, the light that shows all beings in their true colors. In the general confusion, in the moral and material chaos on to which the presence of the enemy imposed the factitious order of terror—the chaos of a world falling in ruins, of a world in gestation—now all that was elemental and essential, the true instincts of man, appeared sooner or later from under the already cracked veneer of conventions, hypocrisies, scruples, and habits. In every separate case, the test of war and enemy occupation, comparable to a catalytic agent, revealed this truth in a crude and unusual light. Official opinion recognized two camps: that of the good and the bad, the felons and the heroes, the perjured and the faithful. Yet it was not quite so simple: between these extreme attitudes, there were innumerable half tones, with many displacements and juxtapositions. Under the broad labels, thousands of nuances were possible. In the darkness of this tangled undergrowth, bristling with snares and traps, it was not always easy to find one's way. Gérard remembered several people of Saint-Clar whom he knew well. The recent, though sincere, Anglophilia of a M. de Balansun appeared to be the very antithesis of the orthodoxy of a M. Lardenne. Yet, actually, both of them were old-fashioned nationalists, good French citizens deeply attached to law and order, whose doctrinal convictions coincided on many points. But when they found themselves faced with the same event, plunged into the arbitrary and threatening darkness, they had reacted to different impulses: one to his pride, the other to his fear, the one by a reflex action of rebelliousness, the other by a reflex action of conservatism. The disinterested *élan* of the one, the other's timid retrenchment behind long-standing, comfortable ramparts, suddenly revealed their respective natures in their fundamental truth. The choice was their own and by their choice they were irrevocably judged. And thus, in the obscure chaos of those years, every man had to meet his own flashing truth face to face, and measure his strength against it. My own truth, Gérard said to himself, is inertia, the inability to choose, the bleak marking time that is my life—is so still today; though today it appears to me in a pitiless light. And Hélène's truth, what was it? What was hidden by the bitterness, the harshness, he had seen briefly last winter? Or rather, who was the unsuspected but real Hélène that they concealed? Francis' truth had been in that movement of revolt at college and in the immediate accession to a systematic attitude of revolt. In the confused labyrinth of this long night, one had sooner or later to pit one's strength against one's instinctive destiny and face up to the inner monster.

8.

GÉRARD left the town in his turn. There was one more week of sunshine, the grape harvest was a merry one. Then the rains began to fall, the west wind stripped the trees of their last leaves and it was winter. Another wartime winter, which Saint-Clar must again overcome. The Gave was much swollen. The water in the swimming pools, which no one troubled to change, turned green like a duck pond. Large leaves rotted on its surface. Night fell earlier. The steps of the patrol echoed loudly in the deserted streets.

A Day in Mid-December, 1943

"Tell her to come in," said Mme Costellot to the maid. She congratulated herself on being alone in the house. Alone with von Brackner. Business of this kind could not be done in the presence of Jacques, or even of M. Lardenne. The two ladies of the family were also out: but those two poor fools didn't really count.

Berthe came in. She carried a shopping bag.

"This is nice of you, Berthe," said Mme Costellot, getting up. "I hope you did not have too much trouble? Did they let you have them without much fuss? How many have you brought? Two dozen. That's splendid! How much do I owe you?"

"Hundred and eighty francs, madame. I beat them down, madame. She wanted two hundred francs. But with me, one can't lay it on too thick."

"You are an excellent businesswoman, Berthe," said Mme Costellot. "Let me have the bag, it's in your way. And do sit down."

She called Marie, the maid, and handed her the bag.

"Put these eggs away and then get Mme Gisèle's shoes at the shoemaker's."

Madame Costellot had more authority than her son's parents-in-law, in whose house she lived.

"Well, my good Berthe," she said, as soon as they were alone. "What's the news? Are you getting used to your new job?"

Two months ago, Gérard Delahaye had dismissed Berthe after she had been particularly insolent. Berthe had left, mad with rage and

shouting vile abuse, even in the street, where she proclaimed that Mme Delahaye was an old witch addicted to sorcery, a faded harlot who sold her senile charms to the Germans, and a dangerous spy against whom all Saint-Clar should be warned. Mme Delahaye, trembling behind the window, heard this torrent of insanity, and wept. Gérard was pale with anger and loathing. He wanted to go into the street and chastise Berthe severely (for only a show of force could subdue this native of the Landes), but his mother entreated him to leave her alone.

A few days later, Berthe succeeded in getting a place with a grocer. He was very rich, and quick tempered. After a week, he "understood" her: he drove her round with kicks on the backside and told her that if she dared annoy him with her stories about the "deuce," he would come up to her room and show her what a real deuce of flesh and blood could do. Berthe was terrified and became meek as a lamb, gentle as a dove. At last she had found her master. She adored him.

Now she began to talk about the grocer. Mme Costellot settled down in her easy chair. She knew that all she need do now was to listen. Berthe was like a phonograph: you just pressed a button and the machine went on turning. To direct the conversation, all you had to do was to drop a hint and adjust the sluice gates controlling the flow of her words.

"And do you see your former mistress sometimes?"

Like an unbalanced shrew, Berthe gave vent to all her grievances against Mme Delahaye, Gérard, and M. de Balansun, in highly colored language, lapsing at times into argot. At a given moment, Mme Costellot decided to change the direction of the current.

"And what do you think of young Francis?"

Berthe's expression became mysterious and sinister. She related what she had heard, what she had discovered, "without meaning to, madame!" and what she had guessed. Mme Costellot got up.

"Berthe," she said, "what you have told me is serious. It is important. Are you prepared to swear that it is true?"

Berthe raised her hand with pathos.

"Let me go to hell when I die," she said.

Mme Costellot paused for a few seconds.

"Berthe," she said at last, "somebody will come and talk to you. Wait for me here. I will be back in five minutes."

She left the room, went up to the first floor and knocked at a door.

"Come in!" said von Brackner's voice.

Twenty minutes later, Berthe left the Lardennes' house. With her

right hand, she was wiping away the traces of tears. In her left, deep in the pocket of her apron, she clutched several thousand-franc notes.

"You didn't have too much trouble?" asked Mme Costellot, as she came into the drawing room.

Von Brackner was stretched out on the sofa. He smiled.

"She is just an idiot," he said. "At first she was frightened. She cried a little. Then she told me everything. I told her she was a good Frenchwoman. I also gave her money. And I told her that if she said a word about it in town I would have her shot!"

He burst out laughing. Mme Costellot looked anxious. Von Brackner got up and came to stand behind her, laying his hands lightly on her shoulders.

"You, too, are a good Frenchwoman—and I mean it."

"Ah," said Mme Costellot, "I don't know whether I am right or not. I believe I am right, but I am not sure."

Von Brackner laid his chin on Mme Costellot's hair.

"You were right. Someday you will be rewarded."

"Oh, no," she retorted, quickly. "No, I don't want a reward of that kind. It would be a little too compromising, in Saint-Clar. I felt I was doing my duty and that is enough for me. All I ask you, Heinz, is to keep your promise."

"My promise?"

"You know. Whatever happens, I don't want that young man to come to any harm."

"*Natürlich!*" he exclaimed, as though the matter were already settled. "*Natürlich!* I have already told you that we will do him no harm. He will only be taught a little lesson, that's all. It will all be most discreet, and French agents will look after the business. French agents. The young man cannot be too fierce. He will allow us to make—a good haul, it's like that you say, *nicht?* A haul, like for fish. After that, we will leave him alone, because he is not very important, and afterward he will be very meek. He will easily admit the error of his ways."

"I don't know," said Mme Costellot. "Ah, it is only because you—forced me, Heinz, that I agreed to this. You forced my hand."

"*Ach, lieber Gott!*" said von Brackner, "if we really wanted to get rid of this young man, it would be quite simple, *nicht?* We could send him to work in Germany. That should reassure you."

She pondered.

"Yes, that's true," she murmured. "Of course, you could have sent him to the S.T.O."

"You see," cried von Brackner, triumphantly. "It is thanks to you that he will not go to the S.T.O."

Gently he forced her to turn toward him. After gazing at her in silence, he shook his head with an air of admiration.

"Marguerite," he murmured, "you are very beautiful today."

A Week Later

"You look in a foul mood," said Tony.

"I'm sick of this," said Philippe. "Sick of the whole damn thing."

"Why?"

"You ask me why! Ten days we've been stewing here. Ten days sitting on our asses in this filthy hole. Playing cards with Allouche, you and the other fellow. And the speeches of the boss on top of it all. D'you call this living?"

"Take the bus and look for trouble in town. Nobody's stopping you."

"A gay spot, Bordeaux in the rain! And it's been raining ever since we came. This town in winter gets me down."

He was lolling in an easy chair, a cigarette between his fingers.

On one arm of the chair stood an ash tray filled with cigarette butts, on the other a liqueur glass. A bottle of cognac stood on the floor at his feet. Tony sat on the floor, facing Philippe, with his legs crossed.

"So you'd rather get plastered?" he asked.

"Anything to pass the time. You're lucky. You never get fed up."

"Never," said Tony, sedately.

"No, never," Philippe repeated angrily. "This job suits you fine, don't it? If you get your sweet little question time every week, you're happy. A nice little session with the usual fun and games. You must miss it, all this time we've been hanging around doing nothing."

"We'll be doing it again."

"Sure we'll be doing it again," Philippe chuckled. "Think it's high time too, don't you?"

"I can wait. But say, how about you? Don't you like the job? You don't mind taking the dough, do you? You don't mind playing with the dames when we've got some? And, you don't mind beating people up, do you?"

"Shut up," said Philippe harshly. "Or I'll shove your teeth in."

"Better hand me a butt," Tony said imperturbably.

He lit the cigarette. Philippe filled his glass and emptied it in one gulp.

"Why the hell did we come to Bordeaux?" he asked.

"I think there'll be something doing in the sector, Saint-Foy-la-Grande way, by what the boss told me. And then farther down south—"

"Down south?"

"Yes, Bayonne way, I think," he said negligently.

He had an expression Philippe knew only too well: an expression of feigned innocence, his lips pursed, his eyes cast down. He was still sitting on the ground near the easy chair, and pretending to examine his fingernails.

"Did you say Bayonne way?" Philippe repeated slowly.

"Think so . . . but I couldn't swear to it."

There was a short silence. Without taking his eyes off Tony, Philippe laid his cigarette onto the ash tray, clutched the arms of his chair with both hands and rose slowly.

Suddenly Tony gave a strangled scream. Philippe had jumped on top of him in a flash. Tony was lying helplessly on his back, while Philippe, one knee on his chest, gripped the collar of his shirt and shook him furiously.

"Now you'll tell me what you're cooking, the old man and you!" he growled. "You rat, you'll tell me what you've been cooking since yesterday. Spit it out, you bastard! Or would you rather I beat it out of you?"

In a fury, he banged Tony's head on the floor boards.

"Will you open your filthy mouth, or would you rather I ripped your guts out?"

He let go. Tony slid from under him with a jerk, his eyes starting out of his head. He tried to get up, stumbled and went down on his knees. Philippe, quick as a wild animal, had already seized him by the throat. Tony tried to shake him off by clutching Philippe's wrists with both hands.

"Le'mme go," he gasped, "le'mme go. Don't be a damn fool, Philippe."

He got to his feet, pale and panting. He adjusted the collar of his shirt, which had been torn in the brief struggle. He gave Philippe a look full of loathing, his eyes flashing with insane fury.

"Think you can get by with this?" he said. "Better be careful. You'll get what's coming to you someday."

Philippe got up and took one step toward him. Tony ran in the direction of the door, but before he could reach it, Philippe had leaped and barred the way.

"I know," murmured Philippe, with concentrated savagery. "My life line is short, that makes you feel good, doesn't it? But you're wrong, my little man!"

Tony retreated and came up against the wall. He looked around him wildly. He flattened his hands against the wall, his fingers outspread. Philippe advanced toward him, quite slowly. A fine rain was beating on the windowpanes.

"Oh, Christ!" cried Tony. "Ask the boss what the hell we're to do at Bayonne! I don't know any more about it than you do. What's hit you?"

The door behind them squeaked. The sound had the effect of rooting Philippe to the spot. He clenched his fists.

"We are quarreling?" said a jovial, unctuous voice. "We're cross? Tut, tut!"

Reassured by the presence of the boss, Tony moved away from the wall and went to stand beside M. Merkel.

"Monsieur is not pleased!" he shrieked. "He thinks he's God Almighty and treats me like dirt. Monsieur wasn't so fussy at Janson!"

"Tony," said M. Merkel, with pacifying gentleness, "do not exasperate your friend by these tender memories. Our friend is like all Frenchmen: he has a short memory."

Philippe had not moved. His back was turned to M. Merkel. One could hear his quick breathing.

"Come, come," said M. Merkel, in a facetious tone, "what's going on here, children? A little domestic squabble? A political discussion? A rather heated argument on the ultimate destiny of man?"

Philippe turned round brusquely. His face was convulsed with a cold rage.

"That's enough," he blurted out in a trembling voice. "I'm sick to death of you and your soft soap. I'm not a kid. You think you're pretty smart, Merkel. You think you can make me do what you like, with your preachings and your jokes. But I'm not Tony or Allouche: I'll never do a damn thing I don't want to and no one can make me."

M. Merkel raised his eyes to heaven with a pitying expression. "The revolt of the mercenaries!" he exclaimed. "How touching! Of course, our friend Philippe has sterling qualities. Well, you indomitable creature, what are you planning to do? My sympathetic understanding

is legendary, my affability proverbial. I am quite prepared to consider your grievances."

"Monsieur does not wish to go to Bayonne!" cried Tony.

"How extraordinary!" exclaimed M. Merkel. "Such beautiful country. And what is more, the country where you first saw the light of day. Ungrateful Philippe, do you refuse to tread on the sacred soil of your natal province, to visit the blessed haunts of your infancy?"

He laid a hand on his heart, rolled his eyes like a singer in a nightclub and sang in a fine bass voice:

*"Je veux revoir ma Normandi-e,
C'est le pays qui m'a donné . . ."*

"Stop it!" shouted Philippe, "I'm tired of your damn guff. I'm sick of you, of your stories, and your stiff neck. I don't know what you've been cooking up since yesterday, but I can tell you that if you're up to some filthy trick, I'm not playing. I'll do what I want to do, and nothing else."

M. Merkel sighed sadly. He called Tony to witness, "Poor Philippe," he murmured, shaking his head. "He reminds me of the unfortunate Emile, nicknamed Bec-de-Lièvre. Do you remember, Tony?"

"Yes. He got too big for his britches too," Tony said venomously.

"Emile?" asked Philippe.

"You didn't know him," said M. Merkel. "That unfortunate young man had a muddled mind . . . very muddled. So that one day, after a particularly serious error, we were forced to separate ourselves from him and hand him over to the secular arm."

"Talk French, can't you?" growled Philippe. "What the hell d'you mean, the secular arm?"

"Emile, too, was incapable of understanding metaphors," sighed M. Merkel. "I will put it this way: we were forced, although it nearly broke our hearts, to entrust his fate to our friends at the rue Lauriston."

Philippe stepped back. Suddenly he resembled a trapped animal.

"Our friends at the rue Lauriston were not able to reform him, I am sorry to say," continued M. Merkel, with a regretful expression. "I understand that the unfortunate Emile did not survive their—friendly remonstrances."

He shook himself, as though to dispel a painful memory.

"But, thanks be to God, there is no connection," he added cheerfully.

"No connection whatever, is there, Tony? My dear Philippe, all this is but a passing cloud, at least so I hope. This incessant rain and the inactivity of the last ten days have jangled your nerves a little. Therefore I forgive you your verbal excess. Patience, my friend. I can tell you that we will soon have some fine work. Recently I have established contact with a *Kommandatur* in the south . . . Good news, Philippe! In two or three days, you will take a holiday in your beautiful, sunny country, and be able to embrace your dear *maman*, whom you have not seen for so many months . . ."

A Sunday at the End of December

The mists enveloping the town dispersed. The bells of the cathedral were ringing for the seven o'clock Mass. The public baths were filling with customers—young workmen with cheeks reddened by the cold, a few German soldiers whose appearance was not particularly Aryan (the splendid shock troops of the beginning of the Occupation had now disappeared. Where had they gone, the six-foot warriors so admired of the inhabitants of Saint-Clar? Now the German soldiers were a sorry lot, pale adolescents afflicted with rickets or old peasants from Thuringia, wizened and gloomy). The young workmen, carrying their football equipment were discussing next Sunday's match when the Equipe de Dax would be pitted against the Union Sportif Claroise. There was a cheerful sound of the splashing of the showers in the cabins and the sentimental or rousing refrains intoned by those taking their baths. The customers numbered very few bourgeois. Despite the shortage of fuel that made it impossible to have a bath at home, the young men of Saint-Clar's upper middle class refused to frequent the public baths, that proletarian establishment created thanks to the initiative of a former socialist mayor. They preferred to manage as well as they could with the domestic tub or to go about with unwashed feet for the remainder of the winter. Only Francis frequented the public baths assiduously: he had the noble simplicity of the Balansuns.

In the hallway, a portrait of the Marshal gazed down with a paternal eye on these fine young Frenchmen, so careful of their bodily cleanliness, these beardless sons of *la Patrie*, pledges of her future strength. The pious hand of a young artisan had added, in large letters, to the wise motto "*Travail-Famille-Patrie*," the word "*Hygiène*."

Francis proceeded to shampoo his hair with great energy. He was

to spend the whole day at the Fair with Marie-Anne. He was anxious to make a good impression. Insofar as he was conscious of his physical appearance, Francis considered himself very commonplace, except for his teeth and hair, which had brought him many compliments.

At eight o'clock, the *cafés* of the town opened. At nine, the owner of the patisserie spread out his wartime cakes. At ten, Lulu Betbeder, the number one trollop of Saint-Clar (a horse dealer, three manufacturers, two German N.C.O.s) made her first round through the town. At eleven, Mme Coryse Salomé, trollop number two (an industrialist, the chief of the *Kommandatur*, and the son of the controller of indirect taxes)—went to the Cathedral to hear High Mass. At half past eleven, Mme Arréguy, trollop number three (Werner, Darricade), clad in the hide of a Burmese panther, went to take an *apéritif* at the Bar Moderne, accompanied by her husband, the resigned cuckold.

At noon, a brilliant congregation streamed out of the cathedral—the faithful who had attended High Mass. M. de Balansun, his missal under his arm, conversed with his friend Lardenne. But the ladies excused themselves. They had to hurry away; they were expected at the *Salle des Fêtes* for the final preparations for the P.O.W. fair. Hélène followed them. She had come home for a week's holiday. Mme Lardenne, the president, had asked her to take over a stall. Francis accompanied Marie-Anne to her house. The Dax football team trooped into the Bar Moderne for *apéritifs*. Mme Arréguy ogled the goal keeper. He was very like Philippe.

At half past twelve, the Bordeaux express arrived at the station: it was only an hour late. Philippe was on the platform, his hands in the pockets of his lumber jacket, its fur collar turned up so that it concealed the lower part of his face. He had been walking up and down the platform, smoking one cigarette after another. Anyone watching him would have noticed his frequent frowns, the contraction of the muscles on his temples, the sudden flashing of his eyes. Philippe was obviously extremely nervous. His eye wandered up and down the platform; having discovered the person he was looking for, he stepped forward. It was M. Merkel. They shook hands. When they passed the sergeant on duty at the exit, M. Merkel showed his papers. The sergeant glanced at them, looked at M. Merkel, smiled and saluted.

"My dear Philippe," said M. Merkel, as soon as they emerged from the station, "I am terribly sorry about this delay. Timetables are a farce nowadays. I suppose you are very impatient? When did you receive my telegram? Yesterday evening. That is what I thought." He looked

around him. The road to the station, which was more or less deserted at this hour, sloped down from a small rise that overlooked the town. "What a delightful site, so calm, so bucolic! And the sun is shining in spite of the sharp cold. How pure the air is, how invigorating, how healthy! I feel rejuvenated. The cuisine is famous, in this part of Béarn, isn't it? I am lunching with von Brackner. Do you know him? A charming man, courteous and refined. I met him at Bordeaux the other day. As a matter of fact, you are lunching with us."

"Impossible," said Philippe, "they are expecting me at home."

"You are lunching with us, Philippe," M. Merkel repeated with amiable firmness. "You can drop in at your house and inform your dear *maman* that a friend has asked you to luncheon. Your dear *maman* will agree, I am sure."

"Why did you come, Merkel?" Philippe interrupted rudely. "Enough of your boloney. I won't play. Anywhere else, I'll do what you like. But here at Saint-Clar, nothing doing. I won't play."

"Your fervent local patriotism does you honor, Philippe. However, the superior interests of the country sometimes exact sacrifices and provoke conflicts—worthy of Corneille, Corneillian conflicts, that is the word," he repeated, shaking his head sadly.

"Nothing doing, Merkel. You think you're God Almighty. You think you can make damn fools of us, Tony, Allouche, and me, with your tony speeches. You love this game. The interests of the country . . . ! Who the hell do you think I am? You don't give a good god-damn about the fate of this country. Neither do I, for that matter. But I don't preach about it. You're not even in it for the dough. Oh, you don't turn up your nose at it, when it comes your way. But really what interests you is," he hesitated, searching for the right word, "it's the rottenness. It doesn't matter what kind of rottenness. Tony, Allouche, myself, the Krauts, or the poor dopes who give in, when they're green with fright and squeal. I just missed being a sucker. I've got your number. And I don't play except when I want to. And let me tell you, Merkel: here, I won't play."

"Don't talk so loud," whispered M. Merkel. "That old lady is looking at us. You will compromise yourself in the eyes of your very dear fellow citizens."

They walked on a few steps in silence.

"Who's it for?" Philippe asked suddenly.

"Pardon me?"

"Who've you come for? Are there any suspects in town?"

"Oh, a dull business. Very dull. But yes, my dear Philippe, do not doubt that there are suspects in this delightful region. Terrorism has spread its net, here as elsewhere. There are suspects. A bit talkative, as everywhere. A bit more talkative here, perhaps; tongues are more readily loosened in the south."

"Who is it?" asked Philippe.

"Von Brackner will tell you. By the way, where is the Bayonne road? We are lunching at the villa *Mon Désir*. Bayonne road. *Mon Désir*. Isn't that charming? And so original, so individual—"

"You know who it is," said Philippe.

"Hardly, my friend. I understand he is a young man of an old aristocratic family."

Philippe stopped short. The narrow road was deserted. M. Merkel slowly turned his soft, clean-shaven face with its fine features to Philippe.

"Come along, we must hurry, my friend. We are late already. I would not like to keep our host waiting."

"A young man of old family—" Philippe began. "The name, Merkel, the name," he said in a low voice.

"Wait, let me think—" He closed his eyes and laid a finger on his temple. "It is a rather queer name for these parts. Talansun, Labansun?"

"*Bordel de Dieu!*" cursed Philippe.

M. Merkel smiled.

"Ah, you know it, I see. It is Labansun, is it not?"

Philippe was livid. He was breathing hard.

"Merkel," he growled, "be careful. You have known all along who it was. You've done it on purpose. You came to Bordeaux on purpose. They send you the lists of suspects from every part of France. You chose this one, because you knew who he was. You knew that I know him. You knew he's the brother of—of the girl I had last winter."

"No!" exclaimed M. Merkel. "The brother of your mistress?"

"Be careful, Merkel," Philippe said in low, rapid accents. "You knew the girl's name. I told Tony one day and you were there. You made me repeat it. You thought it was a curious name. I told you it was a Béarnais name. I've got a good memory. You, too, Merkel, you have a good memory. Three weeks ago, you received new lists. The Béarnais name was on the list. I'm sure of it. And I'm sure that Tony knows what's going on. You cooked it all up with him. It isn't just luck. It's all been cooked up. You must have laughed your heads off, you and Tony. You

picked this guy on purpose. To fix me. To see how I'd take it. To enjoy the joke. To shove me deeper into the muck and enjoy the sight."

M. Merkel raised his white, plump hand to stop the flow of words. He did not appear troubled.

"Philippe," he murmured unctuously. "I am terribly sorry. The brother of your mistress! What an unfortunate coincidence! What a horrible mistake! Ah, when I spoke of Corneillian conflicts just now, I did not know how true my words were."

"Well, it's missed fire!" Philippe jerked out. "Nothing doing."

The episcopal face expressed profound pity.

"Philippe," M. Merkel said very gently, "what a child you are! I believe it is my duty to warn you that you are being watched. They have your description and even your photograph, my friend, nearly everywhere in the southwest, especially along the Spanish frontier. The German police are just waiting for a sign from me to act. Well? Remember the unfortunate Bec-de-Lièvre. If you refuse to face the Corneillian conflicts, Philippe, there is still suicide. But I know you have plenty of common sense," he added, suddenly adopting a jovial tone. "And so to put you at ease with your—conscience, I will tell you that the business will not take place here, but in Bordeaux. At our place in Bordeaux. The young man in question visits Bordeaux from time to time. Come on, we are late. What a lack of courtesy toward a gentleman like von Brackner! Let us hurry, Philippe. This cold air has given me an appetite. Hasn't it you?"

At a quarter past two, Hélène knocked at the front door of the Aréguys' house. She had to see Philippe. She had to, at any price. She had written him a letter, a rather compromising and crazy letter, in September, immediately after she had returned from Saint-Clar. He hadn't come. He hadn't even answered. There hadn't been another night with Philippe. And today, Hélène wanted the letter back. That one, and two or three others, written in a frenzy of desperate sensuality, letters whose folly she now realized. She could not bear the thought that Philippe had these pages signed with her name, supposing he had kept them, which was quite probable. As everything was over between them, as he was never coming back, she resigned herself to losing him. But she wanted to wipe out every trace, destroy every proof, obliterate this written evidence in which immodesty vied with the ridiculous, this evidence of which she felt so ashamed. She knew that Philippe had come to Saint-Clar three days ago. Francis had seen him from a dis-

tance. Today, she had decided to go and see him, regardless of the cost. Two o'clock was the best time: there was nobody on the streets, or hardly anybody. She was trembling as she stood before the front door of the Arréguy's house.

"Come in," called a woman's voice.

She went in. The table was still laid in the kitchen. A smell of stew floated in the thick air. Fernande Arréguy rose to her feet, a napkin in her hand. She looked at Hélène with the same wary expression with which she had measured Francis, a year ago. Then suddenly, her manner became affable.

"Come in, mademoiselle," she said. And turning to a seedy looking man who was sipping coffee beside the kitchen stove, she continued, "This is the demoiselle Balansun—my husband."

Hélène nodded slightly. The man responded with a vague grunt.

"Please excuse me for troubling you," said Hélène. She steadied her voice. "You know me?" she asked, in a tone that she tried to make courteous but that sounded icy and haughty.

Madame Arréguy smiled significantly.

"My son has told me so much about you, mademoiselle."

Hélène blushed violently. There was a silence.

"Actually, I wanted to see your son," she said with a visible effort.

"You're out of luck, he's lunching in town. A friend invited him. But do sit down, mademoiselle."

She pushed a chair forward. Under her friendly, "society" manner, there was a hint of complicity. While she was speaking, she fixed a sharp, knowing look on Hélène, a look that measured her in from head to foot, and lingered on the breasts, the hips, the legs. She might have been a horse dealer inspecting a brood mare.

"Do you know when he will be back?"

"Ah, you can never tell with the likes of him, can you?" said Mme Arréguy, with a sparkle in her eye. "Can you?" she repeated. As she received no answer, she continued, "Can I give him a message?"

"No, thank you. I'll come again this evening, if I may," she said, and she felt that every word was costing her a superhuman effort.

"You'll be going to the Fair, won't you?" asked Fernande. "I'll tell him to drop in there to see you."

"Oh, it's not worth while," Hélène said quickly. "I'll—I'll come back. Excuse me for having disturbed you."

She opened the door and went out. She had not found the strength to say "au revoir."

Fernande Arréguy remained standing where she was, as though she had turned into stone. After a few seconds, she flung her napkin on the table with a furious gesture.

"*Merde alors!*" she snarled, "I make a big effort, I call her mademoiselle every other word, I pretend she still has a right to it, I tell her to sit down, I'm as sweet as pie, and you saw the airs she gave herself? You saw her airs of a duchess talking to a flunkey? You heard how she asked, 'You know who I am?' as though I hadn't the right to know her?" She turned toward the door by which Hélène had just left and continued virulently, "What right do you have to sleep with handsome fellows like my son, you bitch! Who d'you think you are? Queen Victoria? These ruined *aristos* give me a pain! And as to breeding, try and find it. My son's got more of it than you'll ever have, you big gawk!"

It was half past three. The Fair was a great success. Everybody was there. The prisoners from Saint-Clar could consider themselves lucky behind their barbed wire. The *Salle des Fêtes* was jammed. Stalls, displays, bar, buffet, lottery, tombolas. French flags, Chinese lanterns, an immense portrait of the Marshal on the wall. Music, sparkling wine, brioches, fowls, American auctions. Mme Costellot presiding over the fancy goods and fabrics stall; Mme Lardenne baby-faced and simpering, over the kitchen equipment. The Dean, active, energetic, jovial, running from one stall to the other and installing the newcomers. Francis acting as an usher, with the other young men of the committee. A few German privates were emptying bottle after bottle of sparkling wine at the bar. What could you do about it? You couldn't throw them out. They were spending a lot. You had to think of the prisoners. Hélène was at the stall where they sold *objets d'art*. She's aged a lot, the Balansun girl, don't you think? She has lost her freshness. And that sullen look! Well, she's nearly thirty, Hélène is, and she was never what you might call pretty. The Huguenot style. I always said she had the Huguenot style. Good Heavens, here am I talking about the Huguenots and the pastor right behind me! Do you think he heard? That was an awful thing to say. Anyway, it can't be helped now. I could never stand the Protestants. Yes, madame, two hundred francs the meter, it's lovely satinette, a wonderful bargain, just right for your children's overalls! You want three meters? Good. Here you are. Thank you, madame. My goodness, aren't those peasants stingy? She's as rich as Croesus and yet she hesitated about buying three meters of satinette. Hello, there's my son, I'm surprised he deigned to set foot on the fairground. He hates

this kind of thing. Ah! he is with Gérard Delahaye. What's he doing now, that poor Gérard? Is he still teaching school somewhere? Ah, yes! he teaches at a college. Now I remember. Don't you think he could have found something better to do? When I come to think of it, he couldn't; he hasn't the brains, that poor boy. . . . Yes, we're doing wonderfully, Dean. But, just between us, those peasants try to pull a fast one! . . . What were we talking about? . . . He really kills himself, the poor Archdeacon! . . . What were we talking about? . . . Oh yes, about Gérard Delahaye. Yes, he's a booby, he never made a go at anything, poor boy. You know they're quite broke now, stone broke! What can you expect, prices are high, they made out all right before the war, but nowadays . . . They have a little farm, but it isn't enough. Not with the agents you get nowadays. And that poor Mme Delahaye is quite incapable of looking after a farm. Get her away from her music and her table tilting, there's nothing left. Her mind's a sieve. Just think of it, she had a yen for a German who lived at her house, Rustiger, you know, the redhead with the glasses. A Jew, or at least part Jewish. Von Brackner told me so. She kissed him when he left. No, but you understand, at her age. She shouldn't have done it, to begin with, you know how people talk. Their maid was there, so now the whole of Saint-Clar knows about it . . . Careful, here comes her son. "How do you do, Gérard, my dear, we never see you now, how are you? You've persuaded Jacques to come to the Fair? Good for you: he would never have done it for me . . ."

"Let's sit down," said Jacques. "Have some sparkling wine? It isn't bad, it's made with the wine from my vineyards."

Gérard sat down. He had met Jacques Costellot on his way to the Fair. Jacques and he were not on intimate terms and rarely saw each other. Jacques had suggested that they go and have a drink at the Fair. "All my family will be there," he added in a mocking tone, "even my rheumatic and asthmatic father-in-law could not resist the call of duty: to gorge himself for the benefit of the prisoners."

Gérard looked at Jacques Costellot with a mixture of admiration and suspicion. Admiration, for there was no denying that the fellow had a certain distinction; suspicion, because he was too clever.

A commonplace conversation got underway. What was Gérard doing? Still at Sainte-Croix? Was it fun, teaching school? Gérard ought to try and go to the United States after the war. Surely French professors would be much in demand in American universities. And what was life in Paris like? Gloomy, of course. Jacques went there about once a

month. Paris was really gloomy. They talked about new plays. Nothing remarkable playing now, except perhaps the *Antigone* by Anouilh. Although the fundamental ideology did not appeal to Jacques Costellot; he was neither on the side of Creon nor on the side of Antigone. Why did she sacrifice herself, when you came right down to it? Not because of devotion to her brother, nor obedience to the gods, nor even rebellion against the established order, against Creon. She sacrificed herself out of sentimental loathing for the world. It was ridiculous. Loathing of the world provided it wasn't sentimental, could be a stimulant to bigger things.

"Perhaps, in spite of everything, there are causes worth dying for," Gérard suggested timidly.

"Do you know of any?" asked Jacques.

"I know at least one man who is ready to die, if necessary, for one cause." He was thinking of Pierre. "And I don't believe that man is either a dupe or a fool."

"Then he can't really believe in the cause," said Jacques. "He must have too much energy, or a profound love of mankind, or just love fighting and taking risks. Like the people Malraux writes about, you know. I can understand those emotions. Even love of mankind," he added, with a strange little smile. "It may seem strange, but every once in a while I can understand it. I suppose it is an emotion that is more than half physiological; something like the euphoria after a good meal."

Jacques Costellot a lover of mankind? Gérard looked at his strange masklike face, sharp and smiling, the disdainful mouth, the cold eyes. There was no ray of human sympathy in that enigmatic, too well disciplined face. He wondered when Jacques had really ever had that feeling.

"So you don't believe in the objective value of any cause?" Gérard asked.

"No," said Jacques. "And it does not matter which cause, theoretic Communism, the New Order of Hitler, or American democracy with two Fords in every garage, capitalistic Jews, Ku Klux Klan, official optimism, leagues of virtue, and Hollywood. Naturally, if I had the choice, I would vote for American democracy; it's much more comfortable than the other two systems, it's easy and friendly—when you're lucky enough to be neither out of work nor a Negro. As it happens, I am lucky. So, long live the Stars and Stripes!"

"Men are dying so that one day you may enjoy this comfort and this easy way of life," said Gérard.

"Yes, isn't it absurd? For it is obvious that very few know that they are dying for that. And it is also obvious that the great majority have not the slightest desire to die, for that or for anything else, and that they only do so because they are forced to, poor devils. I would like to see the American films they are now showing over there," he continued, in a changed tone.

"The American films?"

"You know: *Three Brave Sailors*, or *Victorious Wings*, or something like that. Patriotic uplift put out by the dagos of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, with heroic young pilots, and nurses bursting with sex appeal, ending up with the 'Star-Spangled Banner' floating in the blue sky to the sound of a march by Sousa."

"Yes, I know," said Gérard. "We, too, have put out that kind of muck. And have you seen the German films?"

"Of course. And I read *Signal* religiously every week. I assure you that the descriptions of the young SS on leave in his home town, with snapshots of his old mother, his fiancée, and his friend, are quite priceless. *Signal* is just as good as the best of the prewar comic magazines. After all, they can't fool us with that kind of stuff now. We just aren't impressed when they wave the tricolor and make fiery speeches about liberty or solidarity. We have understood."

"That's quite true. But when, in actual fact, our liberty is threatened in a concrete fashion, as it is today, we have to try to get it back, I suppose. Faced with the urgency of the threat, we've got to do something about it. It isn't any longer a question of patriotic fervor, it is a matter of life and death."

"In 1939 or 1940, I did what I was ordered," said Jacques. "I did it as well as I could, not with enthusiasm or even from a sense of duty, but out of common decency, if you can call it that. Today, I am outside it all. I refuse to play anyone's game, you understand? If I hoped for something, I would hope for an Allied victory for the reason I have already given. But I also accept the possibility of a Boche victory, and all that would imply. I am ready for anything. And as I accept it for myself, there is no reason why I shouldn't also accept it for others. Under these conditions, I don't need to lift my little finger."

"I understand," said Gérard. "If I didn't know you, I would say that your attitude is a convenient one, because actually you are convinced

that the Allies will win. You are sure, in the end, to have your freedom and your comfort. If you were somebody else, I would say you were a coward or a cynic. But I think I know you. And I think you are only—despairing.”

Jacques shrugged his shoulders and smiled.

“You don’t have to give a label to everything,” he said, drily.

Gérard was thinking that there were millions of men in the world who, whether they wanted to or no, were fighting and suffering so that the world might grow better. There were also millions of men waiting in relative security and living their little lives until the war would be over, until the storm had passed. Many men could be doing something to hasten the end of the war, or, within the limits of their capabilities, help those who were working to that end. But they did nothing. And when the storm had passed, when the Allies had brought peace back to the earth for the time being, these men would heave a sigh of relief. They would say: “At last, it is over. The democracies have won, just what I predicted all along.” They would be present at the victory parades, they would cheer the glorious regiments. Then, with the gradual return to the old way of life, they would pose as responsible citizens of a country they had not bothered to defend, as fiery partisans of a freedom they had allowed others to re-establish. They would expect, with the same rights as the others, to enjoy the benefits of a peace that they had neither purchased with their blood nor with their sufferings. They would be the first to blame the weakness of the government. They would loudly proclaim the inalienable rights of every human being, they, who for five years had seen their fellow humans mocked and tortured without taking the trouble to lift their little finger. They had escaped everything: the foxhole, the camps, the Gestapo, bombs, poverty, and hunger. But once the war was over, they would continue to stake out, within the human community, a place for themselves that the sacrifices and death of others had saved for them. They would have been the “wise guys” of the war. They would be the real victors. I don’t want to have any truck with them, he said to himself.

Yet Jacques was not really one of those. For they expected everything, he expected nothing. Thousands of Frenchmen who could act, who were free to act, expected everything from the Allied crusade. Yet for nothing in the world would they have agreed to join the crusade and risk a particle of their precious skins. They confined themselves to violent criticism of the slowness of the American advance; with a sardonic laugh they would refer to the “myth” of the Allied landing on

the shores of Europe. Jacques, too, refused to take part in the crusade. But he expected nothing. He accepted everything with cold indifference. He couldn't free himself from the physical chain linking his personal destiny to that of the world. But, either out of scorn or out of indifference, he withdrew himself from a moral responsibility, which imposes duties and confers rights. His attitude was clear and logical but it condemned him to solitude.

But I, Gérard said to himself, I have no desire for solitude. I belong to the world. I wish for peace. I want to be a freeman among freemen. Therefore I will do something to earn this freedom. I do not wish to profit by the death of other men.

A secret exaltation was flooding through him, but nothing showed in his face. He looked at Jacques Costellot. "Tomorrow," he told himself, "I will be as good as he is." He was going to work with Pierre. He would not flinch, however difficult the mission, however great the risk. He no longer needed another to give life to his soul. From now on he himself would weave the garland to crown his own brow.

Even if I am not quite sure that the end we are working for is perfectly justified, he thought, I will do something to hasten the arrival of this end. He thought of Pierre. And also of Francis. Pierre, Francis. There is grace in the act of serving. There is virtue in sacrifice. Unaware that he was speaking his thoughts aloud, he repeated softly, "There is virtue in sacrifice."

Jacques smiled again.

"Perhaps there is," he said. "But I am afraid a great deal of literature has been perpetrated on this subject."

His smile became accentuated.

"Speaking of literature," he began.

Gérard felt himself quivering. His entire being was tensed up in the expectation of the blow. He guessed what Jacques was going to say. Jacques was resting his chin in his hands and his elbows on the table; he stared at his friend, a dangerous glint in his eyes.

"Speaking of literature," he said, "I haven't seen your articles in *La Gerbe* and other magazines lately. I suppose you thought it would be better to lay off for a while? It's always a good idea to be careful."

Gérard made a great effort to remain impassive. The blood was mounting up the back of his neck to his ears. No, I will not blush. No, he won't see me blush. Now I know why he asked me here: he did it to ask me this one question, to humiliate me. He is now wondering how I will get out of this fix. He expects me to launch into a patriotic

tirade, an impassioned attempt to vindicate myself, a furious, stammering recantation, such as: "Me, keep on working for those sheets? Never! They are a lot of dirty traitors, I have been misled, deceived, I have found out all kinds of things. But now I've come to my senses." That is what he expects. So that he can despise me even more. Well, for once, the worthy Gérard won't be such a fool.

"No, you know," he said, with hardly exaggerated gentleness, "I've had a lot of work, a lot of hard work, recently. That is why I— But next January, I expect to start in again with my articles in *La Gerbe*. It's too well paid, you see."

Jacques nodded. His eyes crinkled up with amusement and sparkled gaily. He gave a silent little laugh, got up and tapped his friend's shoulder amicably.

"Well played, Gérard!" he exclaimed harshly. "Good old Gérard," he continued, in a tone which was cordial and mocking at the same time. "You can defend yourself much better than you used to. You have improved, since our college days. But I like you better this way. Let's walk around a bit, shall we?"

He made Gérard stand up and laid his hand on his shoulder. "But first, we'll say hello to our dear Hélène, our dear old friend Hélène, who looks as though she were bored to death at the stall for *objets d'art*!"

At four o'clock, a stranger appeared at the Fair, a gentleman no one in Saint-Clar had ever seen before. He had an elegant corpulence, noble episcopal features, a grave and dignified bearing. Slowly he made the round of the hall. At the bar, he delicately sipped a quarter of a glass of sparkling wine, and paid for the whole bottle. He had the benevolent look of a man who takes pleasure in simple rural festivities, a philanthropist who is happy to see money flowing for the benefit of the disinherited. He mingled among the spectators of the lottery. Soon his pockets were full of tickets which he distributed to the little children, like a kindly grandfather who is touched by their innocent little faces. At the American auction, he drove up the bidding so that he was soon surrounded by a little crowd. And when the turkey was at last knocked down to him, at the fabulous price of three thousand francs, and the organizers were about to lay the proud fowl in the arms of the generous donor, he handed it back, begging them to give it to the most needy family in the town. A murmur of admiration arose. The Dean, who

had been informed, rushed to the unknown benefactor, seized both his hands and shook them effusively.

"I do not know to whom I have the honor—" he mumbled.

The stranger protested debonairly, "A man who shall remain unnamed, Monsieur l'Abbé."

"Thank you," exclaimed the Dean. "Thank you. Your noble gesture goes straight to my heart."

"Monsieur l'Abbé," the stranger said gently, "nothing is too much for our beloved prisoners!"

The Dean raised his eyes to heaven.

"At a charity sale held under the aegis of the Marshal, no one can do too much!" the stranger continued with unction.

The Dean coughed. He was prudent. He did not care to compromise himself. Seizing the anonymous benefactor by the arm, he propelled him toward the bar.

At four twenty, Philippe entered the *Salle des Fêtes*. He was looking for someone. His set face emerged from the fur collar of his lumber jacket. He advanced slowly, his features frozen in a stony expression, and looked around him with dominating, ice-cold eyes. His beauty had the inhuman quality of a marble statue. In spite of the dense jostling crowd, the confusion, and the movement, nobody hustled him. People made way for him instinctively. He advanced slowly, formidable, and mysterious as a messenger of destiny. He passed close behind the white-haired stranger, who was leaning against the bar with the Dean, and deigned to glance at him. Then he passed in front of the stall over which Hélène presided, but he did not deign to glance at her.

"Funny," murmured Jacques Costellot.

He was sitting down again, with Gérard, at a table not far from the *objets d'art* stall. He had caught sight of the expression on Hélène's face when Philippe passed her by. He had noticed the slight shudder that went through her.

"I beg your pardon?" asked Gérard.

"No, nothing," said Jacques, "I just noticed that my father-in-law has left the bar. That's funny."

His eyes downcast, he lit a cigarette. He turned the conversation to commonplaces and then said brusquely, "How did our old friend Hélène strike you?"

"Much the same as usual, I think," replied Gérard.

"Do you see her often in Paris? Excuse me. I am a little indiscreet."

"Not at all. No, I don't see much of her."

"How does she live?"

"I don't know. She has her work. She goes out with her girl friends, I suppose. . . . Why do you ask?"

Jacques assumed an indifferent expression.

"Oh, the question just came to my mind that's all. I like Hélène. She always interested me, you know."

His eyes were sparkling.

"I believe she must be very interesting. A little more wine, Gérard? I am really enjoying my afternoon. I don't know why I had such a prejudice against charity sales and fairs!"

Philippe had found the person he was looking for. It was Francis. And suddenly, his stony face became human and friendly. Well, how was Francis? Getting on all right, kid? Still at Saint-Clar? You remember our games of pelota in the old days? Come, let's have a drink. It's good to see you again. Have you got a minute?

Francis was slightly surprised at this cordiality, but not overmuch ("Philippe is such a good fellow"). He followed Philippe and they sat down together at a small table.

Wasn't Francis bored at Saint-Clar? Of course, there were always the movies and a few pretty girls (a nudge, a wink, "Eh, Francis"). But, after all, at our age you want to get around a bit. Get out of the old village. What, Francis had never been to Paris? Well, what do you know. Oh, he went to Bordeaux from time to time? Lectures at the law school? Yes. Not my idea of fun, lectures at the law school. Of course, the trip to Bordeaux was a change, something to break the monotony of a winter in Saint-Clar. By the way, it would be fun to take the trip together next time. When was Francis going to Bordeaux? Next Friday? Oh, too bad, Philippe was going back to Paris on Wednesday. A pity— Next Friday—

The noble, white-haired stranger had sat down at a table not far from them. He allowed his kindly glance to stray round the hall. But the proximity of the stranger seemed to irritate Philippe. He got up and pulled Francis along with him to the other end of the hall.

"Say, Francis," he asked brusquely, "have you ever thought of going across to Spain?"

"No," Francis answered, in amazement. "Why?"

"I dunno. Like your future brother-in-law. To get across to England."

"I have thought of it," said Francis. "But I wouldn't like to leave my parents in the lurch."

How strange Philippe's expression was. He looked tormented, a prey to some kind of malaise, anguish even.

"You know, it wouldn't be for long now," he said. "I can't. Got my job in Paris. But if I were you, Francis, I wouldn't wait a minute. I'd just slip over to Spain. England must be swell just now. Don't you like the idea?"

Francis was slightly disconcerted.

"Because, you see," Philippe continued, in an almost beseeching manner, "I know a guy at the frontier who could get you across. He's reliable. He could get you across in two days, if you liked. It wouldn't cost you more than three thousand. If you haven't got 'em, I have. And I'd be glad to let you have them."

Now Francis was quite dumfounded.

"Thank you ever so much," he murmured. "I know a smuggler there too. But I couldn't leave my parents flat like that."

Philippe was biting his lips.

"Oh, you know one too, do you?" he began. He looked disappointed, troubled, and still distressed. "So you really don't want to get across? I just thought you might be interested, you know. Just a tip from a pal, see. I thought you might like to grab the chance. He's very reliable, that guy. And I can loan you the three notes. Look here, think it over, and if you make up your mind, all you've got to do is to come see me at home. I'll be in Saint-Clar till Wednesday."

The white-haired gentleman had left the Fair, but Philippe was still there. He was shooting at the shooting gallery, filling one target after the other. He seemed rather nervous. Francis had gone back to his duties. The hall was still black with people, and echoing with cries, laughter, and shouts. Outside, night was falling. Behind the hall there was a little garden with trees, bushes, and a few benches. As it was fairly cold outside, nobody had visited the garden except for a few children who went there to play hide-and-seek. After five o'clock, at dusk, two or three young couples ventured out furtively to snatch a kiss in the dark. Francis had conceived the daring plan of taking Marie-Anne out there. They went out and sat on a little bench behind a hedge. They chatted tenderly. They exchanged two or three kisses "like-in-the-movies." After all, on an evening like this. At the end of a quarter of

an hour, Marie-Anne said that she was feeling rather chilly and would like to get her scarf, which she had forgotten at the booth.

"Wait for me here," she whispered, "I'll be back in a minute."

He waited. He was just about to light a cigarette when a couple entered the garden, passed close to Francis without seeing him, and went to stand under a tree, a few yards behind the bench on which he was sitting.

"Why did you drag me out here?" a man's voice asked harshly. "We're all washed up. I never answered your letter, did I? It's over."

A woman's voice answered. It was low pitched, almost hoarse, and she was gasping a little.

"I know," she said. "It's over. And so that you won't have anything to remind you of that unpleasant period, I want to ask you—to return the letters I wrote you. I beg you to give them back to me. Then it will be over. You will never hear from me again."

Francis was holding his breath. He felt paralyzed, of being a part of the stone on which he was sitting. He could no longer feel his heart beating.

"Are you afraid I'll blackmail you?" the man's voice said, in an angry, scornful tone.

"If you have kept those letters, please give them back to me. I will come to your house this evening—"

With a great effort, Francis detached himself from the bench, rose to his feet, crossed the garden soundlessly and rapidly and re-entered the hall. Now his heart was beating madly.

At the door, he ran into Marie-Anne, who was hurrying out, her scarf knotted round her throat. He pushed her back inside the hall and closed the door leading to the garden behind him. Marie-Anne gazed at him with wide-open, startled eyes.

"You're so pale!" she murmured. "What is it, Francis?"

He dragged her to the other end of the hall.

"I felt a bit cold in the garden. . . ."

"Francis, you're going to be ill!" she cried.

"No, no," he stammered. "It's nothing. Excuse me, but I must go home. See you again very soon."

M. de Balansun was generous at the Fair. He spent two hundred francs without batting an eyelid. He invited his friend Lardenne to a glass of sparkling wine, and pinched the waitress' cheeks in a paternal manner. Congratulating the Dean on the success of the fête, he added,

not without malice, "Monsieur le Doyen, does this so successful sale take place under the protection of God or of Caesar?" With a wide gesture, he indicated the immense portrait of the Marshal on the wall. "For in this place I see only the effigy of Caesar," he specified energetically. "And believe me, holy man, never yet have the interests of Caesar, notwithstanding appearances, been as diabolically opposed to the designs of the Almighty."

The Dean gave a faint smile.

"Dear Count," he whispered into M. de Balansun's ear, "the Church is a wise mother. When it is a question of helping her unhappy children, she will compromise with the secular powers, while in secret she prays that their reign may be ephemeral."

The Count stifled an outcry of jubilation. From now on, he looked upon the Dean as one of the great political prelates, diplomats of the cloth, endowed with the breadth of spirit of a Merry del Val or the pious Machiavellism of an Eminence Grise.

He went home, highly satisfied with his day. He demanded that dinner be served immediately. But he had to wait a few minutes: Héléne had not yet returned.

Héléne had not yet returned. At this moment, she was knocking, for the second time that day, at the front door of the Arréguy's house. Above all, she was afraid that Philippe's mother would open the door. But she was desperately resolved to brave anything, even the presence of Mme Arréguy. It was Philippe who opened the door. At the first glance, she guessed that he was in a somber, angry mood.

"Oh, it's you," he said peevishly. "When you get an idea, you don't give up easy."

She walked in.

"Are you alone?" she asked.

She forced herself to keep calm, but her heart was beating with great sledge-hammer blows, and her legs were giving way under her.

"I am," said Philippe. "But I warn you, if you've come for any of the old business, you're wasting your time. You can go back home."

"I have come to get my letters," she exclaimed, raising her head.

He went out of the room. She heard him go up the stairs, pull open a drawer on the first floor, come down again.

"I have two letters from you," he said. "I don't know what's become of the others. Maybe they're at my place in Paris, or maybe I've torn them up. Take these and get out."

She took the two envelopes, verified their contents and calmly slipped them into her bag. She made a great effort to appear under control. He was standing before her, motionless, hard.

"There never was anything between us," he said, suddenly. "Nothing, do you understand. And in any case, it would have been you who asked for it, you who wanted it. But there was nothing. I don't know you."

She stared at him, unable to conceal her amazement. She imagined that she could discern a shade of disdain, of scorn in the young man's expression. . . . Perhaps he was rather ashamed of having let himself fall for a girl ten years older, and poor at that! Wounded vanity of a gigolo accustomed to "cash in" on his favors, and who had once in a while given them for free to a girl who was unworthy of them. Yes, obviously, that must be it.

"There's nothing between us," he repeated, "I don't know you."

She raised her head a little higher. Her lips were trembling. But she smiled insolently.

"I am delighted to find that we agree," she said, in a calm detached voice. "I also prefer to believe that there has been nothing between us. That is why I am anxious to erase every trace. I have always been told, in my family, not to leave personal papers lying around Heaven knows where."

For a moment she thought he was going to strike her. A tremor went through him. He raised his hand as though to bring it down full in Hélène's face, and with an effort controlled himself. He came quite close to her.

"If I wanted to," he growled, "if I wanted to, I'd have you stretched out on that table in a minute, begging me to come and take you, rolling back your eyes with longing. But I don't want to. You make me vomit. And now, get out."

That evening, Gérard wrote a letter to his friend Pierre, quite a brief letter, no more than four or five lines. He asked him for a meeting at the beginning of January.

"I have made up my mind," he wrote. "Eight months ago, I didn't know how to answer you. I liked to think of myself as 'out of it all.' Today, I talked to someone who *is* 'out of it all.' That did it; I have decided; I will work with you. Don't forget what you promised me. Au revoir."

Eight o'clock. At the dinner table, H       thanked Heaven for giving her a loquacious father. For M. de Balansun never hesitated to make conversation with himself when his listeners were inclined to remain silent. Under the cover of his jovial booming, to which they had been accustomed for so many years that they no longer paid any attention, each could retire into himself; there was no need to talk. And, with the exception of the head and father of the family, nobody seemed disposed to chatter that evening at the Balansuns' table. Francis kept his eyes fixed obstinately on his plate, as though weighed down by guilt. What could be the matter with him? Mme de Balansun was watching him furtively, with an anxious air. The Count, sensitive as ever to the slightest change of atmosphere, commented humorously on every little incident at the Fair, repeated the cunning saying of the Dean, that clever man of God whose great diplomatic gifts seemed to predestine him for the highest functions of a prince of the Church, and informed his family that the take had reached the fabulous sum of four hundred thousand francs! Nobody was listening to him. H       had noticed Francis' silence. Two or three times she made an attempt to talk to him. He hardly answered, as though he were intolerably embarrassed. "What can be the matter with him?" H       asked herself. She did not once succeed in meeting his eye.

When the meal was over, Francis went to sit on the sofa, took a paper, and pretended to be absorbed in what he was reading. Mme de Balansun had gone into the kitchen. The Count twiddled the switch of his ancient radio in the na       hope of hearing the Voice of America. H       went to sit beside Francis on the sofa and leaned over his shoulder.

"You seem to be reading something awfully interesting, Francis." She laid her arm round his neck with a caressing gesture she often used with her young brother. But she felt the boy's body tense up and draw away. Francis did not answer. She moved away from him gently and laid her hands on her knees.

Shortly afterward, Francis got up and said that he was tired and would go to bed. He kissed his father and passed in front of H      , who was still sitting on the sofa.

They had kept their childhood habit of kissing each other good night. She held out her arms to him. He seemed to hesitate for a second. Then he looked at her with an expression of bewilderment, suffering, and a kind of horror. Mumbling "Good night," in a muffled voice, he quickly left the room.

She had turned toward the door that he had just closed behind him. Her face betrayed perplexity and anguish.

"Francis," she murmured.

A nasal voice now issued from the radio and, interrupted by horrible cracklings, incited the patriots to open resistance.

Ten o'clock. Von Brackner, seated opposite M. Merkel, was emptying one glass of brandy after the other, in the German manner. M. Merkel's face appeared slightly congested. The two gentlemen were talking with joyous animation. A magnificent bunch of carnations and arum lilies stood on the table.

Saint-Clar was falling asleep. The blue beams at the windows went out one by one. The cold was biting; the darkness complete. A slow hammering of boots sounded on the paving stones. The patrol was making its first round.

BEGINNING OF JANUARY, 1944. FRIDAY

1.

HAVING donned his greatcoat of Pyrenean homespun, M. de Balansun took his stick from the stand in the hall. Francis and he left the house and walked away in the direction of the station. The Count always accompanied his son to the train on the days when Francis went to Bordeaux for the lectures at the law school or on some other business. Francis was wearing an overcoat that was three or four years old; Mme de Balansun had lengthened it very ingeniously, but it was very short and fairly tight. He was a little ashamed of his overcoat. At the beginning of the winter, he had dared to suggest that he would like a new one. M. de Balansun had replied, in a tone of finality, that the garment in question was still perfectly decent and, in any case, at a time when the black marketeers dressed with ostentatious care, persons of "our rank" need not blush to wear rather old-fashioned clothes. It was not meanness that had prompted M. de Balansun to reply in this manner. It simply was part of his role as a "father worthy of Plutarch," it rung the changes on his favorite slogans: "classic austerity," "the family virtue

of ancient Rome," "the simplicity of the great," and "let us scorn the effeminate luxury of a decadent epoch."

M. de Balansun slipped his hand under his son's arm. He talked about the war news of the day and predicted victory for 1944. Ere long "the maniac of Berchtesgaden," the "paranoiac corporal," the "little Wotan with the black lock" would be forced to beg for mercy under the repeated blows of the Allies. The Soviet bear, the British lion, and the American eagle, who had been separated in times gone by by minute ideological differences, would seal world peace by a "*baiser Lamourette*" on a vast scale. And an immense tremor of joy would shake the liberated universe.

"And then," continued the Count, leaving the cosmos for a moment in order to return to more humble and familiar realities, "and then, a great marriage will be celebrated in the house of Balansun! The two lovers will at last be rewarded for their mutual fidelity." He pronounced these words with humor—because of the word "lovers," which he employed in the sense of Racine—but not without a slight tremor of emotion. "Is that not so?" he added, squeezing Francis' arm.

"Yes," said Francis.

He had blushed right up to his ears.

"And who knows," said M. de Balansun, with paternal facetiousness, "in a few years' time, we will be thinking of the celebration of another nuptial ceremony. *Le temps s'en va, le temps s'en va, madame!* Youth urges us on. The fledgling is growing and for him too the season of mating approaches!" he exclaimed sentimentally. Again he squeezed his son's arm. "I know the young person on whom you have fixed your choice. And I must say that I approve of her. That little girl is charming. She will be the delight of our declining days, your mother's and mine. She will, I am convinced, be the best of daughters-in-law."

He really knew Marie-Anne and regarded her parents very highly.

On the platform, M. de Balansun and his son walked up and down, arm in arm like two friends. The arrival of the train was announced.

"Papa," said Francis, "would you please let me have a few cigarettes for the journey? They haven't given out the January ration yet. You must still have a package from last month on you."

"Tut, tut, tut!" exclaimed the Count. "You know very well that I will not tolerate the use of the *poudre à Nicot* in my family. I am, to be sure, a father alert enough to know that you disobey my orders in my absence. But I insist on preventing, when I can do so effectively, the

contracting by my children of an habitual vice that is as fatal as it is stupid. No cigarettes for you, my friend!"

This little tirade, in the style of the *virtus Romana*, had been made for the special edification of a few yokels who were standing near the Balansuns, waiting for the train. With a discreet glance, the Count tried to ascertain the effect.

Francis did not insist. He was a little disappointed, for he liked to smoke in the train. Disappointed and saddened. Why was his father so hard at times? It was true that he did not know he was hard, he believed himself to be energetic, wise, and conscientious.

As the train steamed into the station, M. de Balansun kissed his son. "Au revoir this evening," he said. "We'll wait dinner for you as usual, if the train is not too late." Suddenly he squeezed him hard. "My boy!" he said. He was thinking: "This is my son." He felt so proud of him. He wanted to show all the travelers in the train that this vigorous young man, who looked so distinguished, was his son. "He's a good boy," he told himself. He breathed the fresh, good smell of the healthy young body—his son's body. "This evening, then, my boy," he said, and kissed him again.

The train was crowded. Francis was wedged in the corridor of a third-class compartment between a stout lady laden with parcels and a boy in a Youth Club outfit. Suitcases, bags, and parcels were piled up everywhere. Francis had to stand on one leg, as there was so little room, and every ten minutes he changed the leg. After half an hour, his entire body was stiff. The train wended its way across the Landes desperately slowly. A peasant unpacked his breakfast (consisting of garlic sausage and the drumstick of a goose) and Francis was seized by nausea. He attempted to reach the toilet, but had to give it up: it was impossible to make one's way through the crowded corridor. All the travelers in the compartment were talking simultaneously: rations, war, bombs, the advance in Italy—the advance in Italy, bombs, war, rations. "I hope I won't vomit," Francis said to himself. Between Morcenx and Ichoux, the train stopped for three quarters of an hour: the brakes were locked, somewhere. The stout lady next to Francis sat down on a suitcase. The peasant eating garlic sausage protested: it was his suitcase. The stout lady got up peevishly. Francis wanted to open a window. The entire compartment protested: imagine opening a window in January! The train set off again. Landes, Landes, Landes. At last, toward one o'clock, they arrived at Bordeaux. Francis had managed not to be sick.

Jostled by the crowd of travelers, he crossed to the exit of the Saint Jean station. On either side of the ticket collector's box there was a barrier. Leaning against the barriers, a compact mass of people were waiting for the travelers. Outside on the pavement, Francis expanded his lungs, breathing in the freezing air. The trolley Number Eight was there, at the terminal. Francis must take the Number Eight. A hand came down on his shoulder.

"Francis! Well, this is a piece of luck!"

He turned round. A tall young man stood behind him, dressed in a lumber jacket; a tall, dark young man, who was smiling at him.

It was Philippe.

2.

It was Philippe.

"Yes, it's funny. I just happened to stop off at Bordeaux instead of going straight to Paris. A pal invited me to spend a couple of days with him. I came to the station to meet a girl friend. But she's not here. How are you, kid? Of course, I remember now, you were to come to Bordeaux today. Well, it was lucky barging into you like this!"

Francis noticed that someone was standing behind Philippe, quite close to him, almost pressing against his back. It was a young man with a thin, narrow face, shorter than Philippe by a head. He, too, was wearing a lumber jacket, and both his hands were pushed into its pockets.

Philippe had seized Francis by the shoulder. He propelled him to the edge of the pavement, toward a small black car which stood there, a Peugeot sedan. A man was sitting at the wheel.

"Where are you going? To the law school? I'll take you there. This is my pal's car. Get in."

The back door opened. Francis made a movement, as though to step back. But Philippe was already pushing him in with both hands and followed him quickly into the car. The door banged. The Peugeot started and moved off at top speed. Inside, on the back seat, Philippe had seized Francis round the waist and held him down with all his strength, while Allouche pressed a wad of cotton on to the young man's mouth. Francis struggled hard for a few seconds, then he was still.

Talence, a poor section on the outskirts of Bordeaux—a sordid street, leading on to a dead end. A one-storied house, with all the shutters

closed, gray, somber, and depressing. Six o'clock in the evening. A mist was rising from the Garonne, enveloping the city. On the ground floor of the gray house, a sparsely furnished room; a table, a few chairs, an easy chair covered with material that was torn in several places, from which wisps of horsehair protruded. A radio. A coal stove, which a man of about fifty was just replenishing. It was the man who had driven the black Peugeot. Round the table, which was laid, sat M. Merkel, Allouche, Tony, and Philippe.

"Well," said M. Merkel, after having wiped his lips with his napkin, "after this little dinner I think we might get on with our work. How is our young prisoner, Tony?"

"He was still being sick a quarter of an hour ago," said Tony. "He's thrown up all over the place upstairs. It stinks. The chloroform really fixed him. I've never seen anyone sleep so long after chloroform."

"The slumbers of innocence," said M. Merkel. "I don't think we'll have much trouble."

"No. This'll be a cinch!" said Tony calmly.

"A cinch, as you say," repeated M. Merkel. "But this little fish will help us to make a fine haul, to speak like the excellent von Brackner, who is conversant with every *finesse* of our language. The young man, himself, is unimportant. But he knows names and addresses, at Saint-Clar and here, at Bordeaux. Everything points to the fact that he maintained a kind of liaison between Bordeaux and the Basses-Pyrénées. The essential thing is that we should have these names and addresses."

He turned to Philippe.

"A little more cheese, my friend? You have eaten nothing! . . . You are not doing honor to our host and chef, the good Lavigne!"

Lavigne, the man who had been replenishing the stove, sniggered. "Thank you, I'm not hungry," said Philippe.

He had his elbows on the table and he looked distressed. He was biting his knuckles.

"Monsieur Merkel," he began, in a humble tone.

"Yes?"

"Do you remember?"

"What?" asked Merkel, sipping his cognac.

"Your promise," stuttered Philippe. "You promised not to hurt him. You promised not to touch him."

"But, of course, my dear Philippe," M. Merkel said amiably. "I will consider, as best I can, your praiseworthy sympathies for this poor, misguided young man. I believe it should be quite easy. Besides, you will

not be present at the interview. It might not be pleasant for you. You see that I have your feelings at heart. You will stay down here under the care of our friend Lavigne."

"Do you think I'll play you a lousy trick?" asked Philippe. "What are you afraid of? You've taken my gun away."

"Just as a simple precaution, Philippe. You are sensitive and fastidious, but a little muddleheaded as well. That is also the reason why I had you closely watched by Tony this morning," he added. "Our poor Tony was brokenhearted at having to exercise so close a surveillance on his dear Philippe. An armed surveillance, was it not so, Tony?"

"It'll teach him," said Tony coldly, without looking at Philippe. "If he'd budged, I'd have plucked him."

A light glinted suddenly in Philippe's eyes. His jaws contracted.

M. Merkel was drinking his cognac. Once again, he raised his unctuous voice. "To think," he said, "that this poor misguided young man belongs to a family of high lineage. A family whose crest proclaims a noble ideal '*Toujours plus haut!*' How did he come to betray this ideal, in the service of which, I am convinced, his ancestors distinguished themselves?" A veiled malice sparkled in his eyes. He appeared to be savoring profoundly each word he uttered, rolling it round his tongue like a delectable fruit. He turned to Allouche, "You see, noble Berber, one of the saddest things of our time is the mirage of a false greatness that captures so many young Frenchmen, even the most honest and the most deserving. The victims are recruited even from the ranks of the educated bourgeoisie and the old aristocracy, which is fully conscious of its civic duties. This epoch, my dear Allouche, will have consummated the intellectual and moral bankruptcy of men of good will."

Allouche was not listening. He himself seemed to appreciate his own isolation and the incongruity of his speeches as the finishing touches of *raffinement*, the supreme savor of a vast and mysterious joke.

"Well, it is time, I think," said M. Merkel. "Tony, Allouche, come along, children."

The three men left the room. One could hear them climb the stairs leading to the first floor. Philippe remained alone with Lavigne. The latter installed himself in an easy chair and lit a cigarette. Above them, they heard the sound of a key turning in a lock and of a door opening and shutting. A few seconds later, Tony's shrill, mocking voice: "How are we now, my beauty? No longer sick? Come on, where are your manners, pretty little terrorist. Up!" One would have thought he were telling a dog to get up on his hind legs: "Come, up, up—"

A sound of footsteps, the noise of a chair being moved. Once again Tony's voice, "Sit down, little one! . . . Look straight at the gentleman . . ."

Silence. Philippe had stood up and raised his head to the ceiling. He was still biting his fist. Lavigne observed him quietly, smoking his cigarette. Suddenly, M. Merkel's voice was raised. One could not distinguish the words, the voice was too low, rather muffled and booming. It sounded through the ceiling in a kind of harmonious and monotonous humming, but it was quite unintelligible. Philippe began to walk up and down the room. Lavigne, cigarette between his lips, followed these comings and goings with his eyes. From time to time Philippe glanced at his watch. Six ten, six twenty, six twenty-five. Up there, the muffled humming continued almost without a pause. Philippe was still walking about, biting his knuckles. Six thirty, six thirty-five. . . .

"Hey, you're making me feel seasick," said Lavigne. "What about sitting down for a change?"

"He's still preaching," mumbled Philippe. "D'you hear him? The kid doesn't want to talk. I'm sure the kid won't talk."

Lavigne shrugged his shoulders: "What do you expect? A youngster like that. He'll confess all right. And snivel too."

Twenty minutes to seven. Philippe had started pacing again. His face was distorted. A quarter to seven. Suddenly, up there, the humming of M. Merkel's voice stopped. Philippe became motionless and raised his head. He was holding his breath. Silence. In the room the stove crackled softly.

There was a muffled cry. Then M. Merkel's voice exclaiming in what seemed a pitiful manner. Philippe was wringing his hands.

"D'you hear?" he panted. "The kid screamed. The preaching's over. They've begun the real job. The kid didn't want to talk, I was sure."

Once again M. Merkel's voice rose. This time it seemed to be asking a question. A further prolonged pause. Philippe had taken a handkerchief from his pocket and was wiping his neck. A dull blow, followed by a faint moan. Philippe clenched his fists.

"It's Tony," he said tonelessly. "Tony's laying into him."

Lavigne lit another cigarette. Getting up slowly, he went to the radio and turned the switch.

"Radio Andorra, as usual," he announced.

Another dull blow upstairs. And Tony's shrill, hissing voice, "You want me to spoil them, those pretty little eyes, eh, little one?"

Philippe shuddered. He wiped his forehead.

*Aqui. Radio Andorra
Escuchemos ahora Tchi Tchi
que canta Tino Rossi*

Another moan, then the dull thud of a body falling. A brief silence. A door on the floor above opened and shut again; the sound of the lock; the steps of three men on the staircase. A syrupy voice rose from the radio:

*Elle n'a que seize ans
Et faut voir comme . . .*

The three men came in. The boss was smoking a cigar. At the sight of the cigar, Philippe opened his eyes wide. He walked up to M. Merkel, pointing to the cigar.

"You told me—" he stammered. "You haven't—"

He did not finish his sentence. He was wringing his hands. M. Merkel stared at him coldly.

"Your friend is obstinate," he said, with a trace of anger.

"You must let me speak to him, boss," Philippe said haltingly. "With me, it'll work. He knows me. Let me go and talk to him, M. Merkel."

"Not now, anyway," Tony intervened. "He's out like a light."

"Will you let me, M. Merkel?" begged Philippe.

"I consent to give him this opportunity," said M. Merkel. "In a little while you can go and speak to him. I give you ten minutes, not one more. Then we'll come upstairs, Tony, Allouche, and I. I advise you to do your utmost to convince him."

*Un jour quand tu seras vieille, tchi, tchi,
Tu diras, baissant l'oreille, tchi, tchi.*

"Zobil!" exclaimed Allouche. "It's stifling hot in this cagnal!"

He took off his leather vest and hung it over the back of the chair. M. Merkel sat down in the easy chair and smoothed his white hair. Allouche opened the sideboard and took out a bottle of wine.

"Give me some," said Tony.

He approached Allouche. Lavigne was standing by the radio, regulating the sound. Philippe looked at all three men in turn. He slipped imperceptibly toward the chair on which Allouche had hung his vest. He made a rapid movement. Nobody had seen it.

"Like a glass too, Philippe?" Allouche suggested amicably.

"No, thank you," said Philippe. He turned to M. Merkel.

"Do I go now, boss?"

M. Merkel inclined his head.

"In ten minutes exactly, we will join you. Here is the key."

Philippe took the key and went out. He climbed the stairs and entered the room. A sour smell of vomit made his stomach turn. He turned on the electric light. The room was bare, except for a mattress laid down along the wall, two chairs facing each other, directly under the electric light bulb. A cardboard lampshade directed all the light, violent and crude, on one of the chairs, leaving the other in the shadow. Francis was stretched out full length, his torso on the floor, his legs across the mattress. His shirt was lying beside him, in a little soiled white heap. Blood flowed from his nostrils and his mouth. He was gasping very feebly.

"Francis," said Philippe.

He knelt down beside him and seized him by the shoulders. He noticed that the young man's chest was covered with small dark-red blisters.

"Francis," he repeated.

Francis opened his eyes. At the sight of Philippe, a kind of animal fear enlarged his pupils. He turned his head away. Philippe lifted him gently and laid him on the mattress. He bent over him.

"It wasn't my fault," he gasped, all in one breath. "They made me, with threats. They fixed it all up between themselves, ahead of time. I didn't know anything. I tried to fight them. Can you hear me?"

Francis' eyes shone with a metallic gleam in his terrified face. Philippe shuddered.

"Don't look at me like that," he stammered. Francis opened his mouth and murmured something inaudible.

"What are you saying?" whispered Philippe.

Francis made an effort, "Who told you?"

"Who told me what?"

In the icy room, violently illuminated by the electric bulb, their dialogue was only a barely articulated murmur.

"Did Hélène . . . tell you . . . I was . . . ?"

Philippe stifled a cry. He wrung his hands.

"What are you talking about?" he exclaimed, with smothered violence.

"I know Hélène and you . . ." said Francis. He did not finish what he was saying. He closed his eyes as though exhausted. After a few seconds, he opened them again. He made an effort to speak.

"She may have told you. . . . About me . . ." he began. "You may have asked her . . . in exchange for the letters . . . blackmail. . . ."

Philippe bit his fists. He felt that now his mind would give way.

"Tell me the truth," continued Francis. "Please . . ."

He gazed entreatingly at Philippe's ravaged face. His entire life, an eternity of certainty and peace, seem to hang on the words Philippe would speak. His eyes were dilated in unspeakable distress. He tried to prop himself up on his elbows. An eternity of peace and certainty hung on Philippe's words.

The latter stared at Francis as though he were trying to understand, to guess the purpose of this absurd and unjustifiable question, which required a truthful answer.

From the ground floor, the voluptuous words of the *chanson* floated up:

*Les douces rondeurs
De sa poitrine,
Qui les rend fous.*

Philippe seized Francis by the shoulders.

"If I tell you the truth, will you talk?"

Francis shook his head.

"No," he breathed. "But, please, Philippe. Tell me the truth. Did Hélène tell you?"

He had raised himself up. He was leaning on his elbows with all his strength. He stared intensely at the ravaged face opposite, at the mouth that was about to decide an eternity of peace or an eternity of horror.

"No," Philippe said suddenly. "Hélène told me nothing. She never spoke of you to me. Never. I swear it to you, Francis. I swear it on my life."

Francis closed his eyes and let himself fall back on the mattress. An expression of infinite gentleness spread over his relaxed features. He smiled weakly. "Thank you, Philippe," he breathed. "Now . . . you can go and get them."

"Will you talk, Francis?"

"No. . . . But now everything will be easier. . . ."

His head lay back on the mattress, his expression calm and relaxed. His eyelids were closed. A faint smile hovered round his lips.

In the silence, one heard Philippe's quick breathing, and the refrain:

O Catharinetta bella, tchi, tchi.

"You know what they'll do to you, Francis?" Philippe gasped. "You know the things they do? You must talk. They'll let you go. I'll get you across to Spain tomorrow, at once. You must talk, Francis."

The young man shook his head gently. Philippe leaned over him in desperation.

"They'll drive needles under your nails. Talk, Francis! Afterward, you'll be safe. I'll get you across to Spain. You don't know what they can do to you. They'll break your teeth, one by one, with a hammer. . . ."

Francis did not move. Several seconds elapsed. Suddenly, Philippe plunged his hand into the pocket of his jacket. A savage resolution hardened his features and gave his eyes a sparkling, fixed stare.

"Missed this time, Merkel!" he hissed between his teeth.

He seized Francis by the shoulders and shook him.

"Listen," he said, in a low urgent voice. "Listen! They aren't going to get me and they aren't going to get you either. Your shirt—where's your shirt?"

He discovered it on the floor and picked it up rapidly. He raised Francis' inert body, and hastily slipped the shirt over it. Then he lifted the young man in his arms and stood up with his burden.

Very softly, he moved the chair in the shadow and sat Francis down on it so that he was placed facing the door of the room. He took an automatic from his pocket and put it into Francis' hand.

"D'you know how to use it? It's loaded, all you have to do is release the safety. Now, listen: when they come in, shoot. Shoot straight at them. Knock 'em down. Take good aim at the young one who beat you up. Get out quickly and come down. I'll be at the bottom of the stairs. I'll have to settle the guy there. The door to the street will be open. We'll run. I'll see to the rest. I'll give you my jacket when we get out. Do you understand?"

The young man looked at his hand that held the revolver. Then he looked at Philippe.

"Have you understood? They come in: they won't see you well, you're in the shadow. You shoot at the lot and then run like hell. I'll wait for you at the bottom of the stairs. Will you be able to walk? You've got to walk, d'you hear? You've got to. They won't get us, Francis!"

A door opened on the ground floor.

"God's teeth!" Philippe swore softly. "They're coming up. Hide the gun behind your back."

In three bounds, he was on the landing. He closed the door and went down deliberately, while M. Merkel and Tony mounted toward him. Halfway on the stairs, he stepped back against the wall to let them pass. He smiled.

"He'll talk, boss," he said quickly. "It's all set—it was easy."

He went down the stairs and pushed open the door of the room on the ground floor. Lavigne was sitting in the easy chair, smoking a cigarette. Allouche was pushing the furniture around with exclamations of rage.

"Son of a bitch of a mother—damn gun! Where the hell is it?"

Philippe closed the door softly and turned the key in the lock. It hadn't taken more than two or three seconds. On the landing upstairs, M. Merkel was turning the knob of the door. Philippe flattened himself into the corner of the wall, gripping the knob of the front door with one hand. His head was raised to the landing, he held his breath. M. Merkel and Tony had entered the room.

The discharge of a firearm shook the house. Immediately there was a stifled exclamation and the sound of footsteps.

"Come down, Francis!" yelled Philippe.

Francis appeared on the landing, his open shirt revealing his bare chest. His hand clutched the revolver, still smoking. Philippe flung open the door to the street, so wide that it banged against the wall.

"Hurry!" he shouted.

Francis was coming down the stairs with difficulty, leaning one arm against the wall. He stumbled; found his balance again. In the ground floor room, Lavigne and Allouche were trying to break down the door. One could hear heavy blows against the wood. Suddenly on the landing a hand appeared beyond the banisters. It held a revolver.

"Look out!" cried Philippe.

Francis had nearly reached the last step. He turned round, his back to the wall, and raised his arm. At the same moment, three shots

cracked out so close together that they sounded like one. Francis fell forward, his arms folded over his belly. The revolver he had been holding in his right hand clattered onto the steps.

Philippe clutched at his throat, his face convulsed with horror. Up there on the landing, Tony was leaning over the banisters, aiming the revolver at him. With one bound, Philippe was outside. Almost immediately, another shot rang out. A piece of plaster fell from the wall just beside the front door.

3.

HE RAN like a madman the whole length of the dark, deserted street. He came out onto an avenue, slowed down and held on to a lamppost. Gasping, he pressed one hand to his chest.

"The bastards, the swine," he sobbed. He began to run again. At the end of the avenue, a trolley was waiting. Philippe ran faster and jumped onto it just as it was moving off.

"You shouldn't run like that, sonny," said the conductor. "You'd have got the next one in ten minutes. Heavens alive, you'll strain your heart, lad."

Philippe looked at his watch: seven twenty-five. The trolley clattered along noisily. Philippe leaned his head against the back of the seat. A woman was sitting opposite to him. They were the only occupants of the vehicle, except for the conductor. The woman looked at Philippe anxiously. She exchanged a glance with the conductor.

"I'm afraid the young man is going to faint," she said.

Twenty minutes later, Philippe made his way to the ticket counter of the Saint Jean station. The express was due to leave for Paris at five minutes to eight. Philippe bought a ticket and went onto the platform. He locked himself in the lavatory and remained there until four minutes to eight.

The door of the ground floor room was still hanging by one of its hinges. On the last steps of the staircase lay a motionless body, the head dangling down backward from the bottom step. M. Merkel, Allouche, Tony, and Lavigne were standing around the body. The door to the street was closed again. Tony held his left arm with his hand. The sleeve of his jacket was torn and stained with blood. There was a heavy silence.

M. Merkel spoke first.

"Lavigne," he said, "ring up the *Kommandatur*. All trains leaving tonight for the southwest must be searched and the police on the Spanish frontier informed. They must bring him back to us—alive."

He laid a hand on Tony's shoulder.

"Go and see to your arm."

"It's nothing, boss, just a scratch." He kicked the motionless body with his boot.

"Swine! He wanted to do me in, the bastard!"

"As to you, Allouche," M. Merkel continued drily, "your carelessness will be rewarded too."

Allouche tore his hair.

"*Inaaldin Bebek!* It wasn't my fault, boss," he whined. "He took my gun out of my pocket. I don't know how he did it." He beat his breast with great blows. He began to weep. "Oh, my poor bitch of a mother, why didn't you kill me when I was born? If anyone has bad luck it's always me. If a *zob* falls from heaven."

Sobs stifled his voice. He went into the ground floor room and let himself fall into the easy chair. Big tears ran down his cheeks.

Lavigne went up to the first floor. The telephone receiver clicked. M. Merkel contemplated the bleeding body at his feet. A grimace of loathing and hatred distorted his smooth, noble face.

"He would have talked, in spite of everything," he snarled. "He would have talked. He could not have resisted much longer. Young idiot! And now he will wear the martyr's crown. He will be glorified in public speeches. And this sheeplike obstinacy, this bleating stupidity will be held up as an example to the younger generation. The world has not suffered the punishment it deserves."

With the toe of his shoe, he lifted the swollen face, smeared with clotted blood. The sightless eyes were still open.

"The Holy Face of universal stupidity," said M. Merkel.

He turned toward Tony.

"When you have bound up your arm, you and Lavigne will take the car and you'll go and throw that into a ditch. Lavigne knows the *pignadas* of the neighborhood. You must throw him naked into the ditch. And don't forget the razor, for the usual attentions. He is still a little too recognizable; he might be identified . . . someday."

Part Three

THE NEXT MORNING

"Is MONSIEUR at home?" asked Philippe. The little maid shook her head.

"Is madame at home?"

The little maid looked at him in a frightened way and did not reply.

"I've just spent the night on the train," he said, passing his hand through his tousled hair. "My coat was stolen. That's why I look like this. Don't be frightened. Go and tell madame that I am here."

Left alone, he glanced into one of the tall mirrors that covered the walls of the drawing room. He rearranged his collar and tie and turned down the lapels of his jacket, which he had turned up for warmth during the night. His face was ashen and drawn, his eyes shone feverishly, and his chin and cheeks were blue with the new growth of beard. He took a cigarette from his pocket and lit it with a nervous gesture. Then he sat down on an easy chair, only to stand up again almost immediately, and, after having inhaled two or three whiffs of his cigarette, he crushed it out in an immense crystal ash tray. The room was luxuriously appointed, like a stage set for a bourgeois comedy. Pictures of nudes, hung all over it, also gave it the appearance of a brothel. There was a little bar in one corner. Philippe poured out a large glass of brandy and emptied it in one gulp. Now he noticed that he was shivering with cold.

A door upholstered in white satin now opened. A woman appeared.

She was dressed in a pale blue dressing gown lined with fur, and on her feet she wore blood-red slippers. She might have been a younger, fresher Mme Arréguy. Closing the door, she leaned against it. She stared at Philippe, her eyes wide with astonishment and a kind of fear.

"Have you killed someone?" she murmured.

He made a step toward her, his arms outstretched.

"Don't touch me!" she screamed, flattening herself against the upholstered door. "Stay where you are!"

"Aunt Eliane—"

"Stay where you are." She made a movement with her chin toward the mirrors on the walls. "Look at yourself," she continued, her voice trembling. "You look like a murderer!"

"I haven't done anything, Aunt Eliane," he said in a low voice, "I haven't killed anyone. I've spent the night on the train. The police are after me. The Gestapo, both French and Boche. I'm a hunted man."

Seeing the woman's horror-stricken expression, he raised his hand and continued precipitately, "But I haven't done anything, Aunt Eliane, I swear."

"Get out of here!"

She moved away from the upholstered door and slipped across to the other door, without taking her eyes off him.

"Get out," she ordered, trembling. "I don't want any fuss here. I won't have the Gestapo in my house."

"No, I won't go," he said with sudden firmness. "The Gestapo won't come here. They haven't got your address. They don't know who you are. You've got to hide me."

"Get out," she repeated. "I don't know what you've done, but I know you're no good."

He made a step toward her and seized her wrists.

"You're going to hide me," he said fiercely. "If they get me, I'll give you away, Henry and you. I know enough about you to have you both juggled." He came close enough to touch her face. "D'you get that?"

The woman's eyes dilated with terror. "Let me go!" she breathed, trying to disengage herself. "You're hurting me."

He relaxed his grip on her. She moved away from him. Bending forward, she rubbed her wrists softly. He leaned against the wall and dug his hands into the pockets of his coat. His jaws were contracted, his eyes staring and expressionless. The woman turned her back on him. Suddenly she swung round.

"I can't hide you here," she said in a dry tone. "Henry wouldn't like

it. But I've got an old friend at Montmartre. She rents rooms. *L'hôtel, du Levant*. It's a call house, but she's on good terms with the cops. She's an informer from time to time. She'll give you a room. No danger for you. I'll arrange all that. She'd like nothing better than to do me a favor, for reasons that are none of your business. I'll take you there."

"There's another thing," he said. "I burned all my papers in the washroom this morning. I must have a new identity card, under another name, of course. Henry can get me one in four days, he's used to it. And naturally, I need some cash."

She gave him a quick glance filled with rage and fear and began to walk round the room. He remained standing, leaning against the wall, motionless, his face ashen and rigid. She stopped in front of him.

"Does your mother know?" she asked.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"No, of course she doesn't," he snarled. "Don't interfere. This is business."

She stepped into the center of the room, took a cigarette from a box and lit it.

"Do you want something to eat?" she asked.

"Yes. I'm hungry. . . ."

His body, which had been rigid and motionless, seemed suddenly to slump. An expression of distress and intense fatigue distorted his set features.

"I'll tell Louise to get you lunch," she said. "I must dress. Wait for me."

Cigarette between her lips, she went toward the upholstered door. Philippe staggered away from the wall and let himself fall heavily into a chair. He leaned his head against the back. Tears hung between his half-closed eyelids.

The woman turned around. She ran toward him and knelt down by his side. "My lamb!" she cried.

"It's nothing," he murmured. "I'm just exhausted. God, I haven't slept for a week. I'm done in."

She took the boy's head between her hands.

"My little Philippe. I was mean to you. I was frightened, you understand. Don't cry, my darling."

She bent over him and kissed his hair.

Twelve Days Later

"Hey! Morning, Berthe. Have you been to market? Wait for me a moment."

"Morning, Elise. Sure, I'm coming back from market and my shopping bags as good as empty. Lucky the master's not hard up. He's got all he wants, he has."

"Was the market crowded?"

"Not a soul there. The peasant women don't even bother to sell controlled stuff. The Boches go and buy everything at the farms."

"And what's the news in town? It seems that everybody's talking of nothing but those poor young fellows. . . ."

"Tch, tch, tch . . . poor boys. . . . They say they were all arrested together at Bordeaux station. There were some from Dax, from Mont-de-Marsan, from Bayonne, from all over the place. It seems that the Germans searched the trains. They say young Lescoumes and young Chasseiux were arrested together."

"And how about young Balansun?"

Berthe cast her eyes down and shuffled her feet.

"With the others, I guess."

"They say his father's sick over it."

"I don't know. Well, I have to leave now. With my master you've got to be on the dot. Well, bye-bye, Elise."

"Eh, wait a minute. You're in an awful rush today. Is that all they're talking about in town?"

"Oh, sure, I haven't heard anything else."

"And what do they say about the war?"

"Oh, I don't know. They say it'll be all over this year. The Russians, they're advancing every day."

"All the better, all the better. It won't be soon enough for me when we see the Boches move out. Though there'll be some who'll be very sad to see the last of them!"

"Eh, you're right there. My old mistress, she'll be crying her eyes out."

"Who'd have thought that the old thing was like that!"

"The world is a terrible place nowadays, my poor Elise. There are no honest people left."

"True enough. When you read the paper, you see nothing but dis-

honesty all over the place. Oh, is that today's *Patriote des Pyrénées* that you've got there? Let me look at it a minute, just to see the headlines."

Elise unfolded the paper and glanced through it. In a low voice she read a few news items aloud, interspersing them with commentaries of her own.

"*The elastic withdrawal of the Germans armies in Russia. . . .* They're very elastic these days, don't you agree, Berthe? *At Salles-de-Béarn, a delegation of veterans, in the course of the moving ceremony, deposited a wreath at the base of the War Memorial. . . .* Those ham actors at Salles, I ask you. And it seems that by evening each was drunker than the other, the veterans of Salles, headed by the Mayor and the Dean. . . . *At Bayonne, Mrs. L . . . arrested for abortion. . . .* That's a good thing. And bicycle thefts. And a Spaniard who stabs his mistress. And traffic in bread coupons. Nothing but things of that sort. What an awful time we're living in, after all! *In a pignada outside Bordeaux the body of a naked young man is found. . . .* Ooh, that's interesting! *in a mutilated state. Death seems to have occurred two weeks ago. The victim was killed by three bullets from a revolver and savagely mutilated. The findings at the autopsy point to his age being between 18 and 20. He could not be identified. It appears that the crime was perpetrated by a sadist. . . .* It's awful, there are more and more of those sadists around. You remember the crime at Sauverterre last year? You know, the woman who was cut in two? Well, there again, that was a sadist. People are all going crazy, I believe. *The inhabitants of Toulouse gave Marshal Pétain an enthusiastic reception.* He's got a fine head, say what you like, the old man has. It seems he's come to a secret agreement with the English. Oh, he's a sly one, Pétain is. . . ."

"Well, I've no more time, Elise. My master gets mad if I come home late. Give me the paper. Have you read all the news? Good. Well, good-by to you."

M. de Balansun was sitting in front of the fireplace in the kitchen, where a miserable fire was now going out. He was wrapped in his great-coat. He gazed at the embers with a dreamy expression, while his wife finished clearing away the dinner. On the mantelpiece lay a newspaper as yet unopened: *Le Patriote des Pyrénées*. M. de Balansun took it automatically, tore off the wrapper, unfolded it and let his eye travel over it absent-mindedly. Suddenly his hands, which were holding the out-

spread sheets, began to shake. They shook for the best part of a minute. Then M. de Balansun folded the paper deliberately, slipped it into the inner pocket of his coat and rose.

"Are you going to bed?" asked Mme de Balansun.

The Count did not answer. He was holding on to the mantelshelf with both hands. He turned round slowly. His face was ashen. He took two or three uncertain steps toward the center of the kitchen, faltering like a blind man, then he held on to the table again. Mme de Balansun did not even have time to catch him before he fell to the floor in a dead faint.

Four Days Later

"Oh, it's you?" said Justin Darricade. "How about knocking before you come in?"

He quickly gathered up the papers spread out on his desk and slipped them into a drawer. Mme Arréguy, wearing her eternal "furs," had just walked into the room. The rain was beating against the window-panes. It was cold in spite of the gas fire.

"You're in a foul temper today," she said. "Listen, if you don't want to see me, speak up. Am I disturbing you? You got secrets?" she said, pointing to the drawer into which he had pushed the papers.

"None of your business," he growled moodily.

"All right, all right." She shrugged her shoulders. "I don't give a damn about your secrets anyhow. It stinks of gas here." She went to the window. "What filthy weather! It's been pouring for the last two weeks. I'm fed up. I'm fed up with the winter, with Saint-Clar, with the fleet, with my husband, with everything."

"Werner has left, of course."

"I don't give a damn about Werner either, you know that. He left for Russia, poor dope. I'm very sorry for him, but that isn't what's getting me down."

She stood her umbrella in a corner, drew off her coat and, sitting down in front of the gas fire, stretched out her feet toward the flame. Steam rose up from the shoes and the woolen stockings.

"My son's been gone for more than a month. I haven't had a single letter from him. It worries me. He promised to write at once. I'm afraid something's happened to him."

"What could have happened to him? He's smart enough to look after himself. He's just too lazy to write, that's all."

"Since those arrests in Bordeaux I've been anxious. Philippe left for Paris just two days before. He had luck. Just think if he'd left on Friday instead of Wednesday, he might have been arrested too. But how do I know that the Boches haven't made raids like that nearly everywhere, in Paris, too, for instance?"

"It would be an extraordinary coincidence if Philippe had been arrested too, nearly at the same time as the other young men from Saint-Clar."

"Well! Things like that can happen, in these stinking times. Well, if it's not that, something else is wrong. Maybe he's sick."

"Sick! What will you think of next? Your boy's as strong as a horse. Besides, if he were sick, your sister would have let you know." Mme Arréguy frowned.

"I don't know. You see, he didn't live at Eliane's any more. I think he'd taken an apartment with a friend. I s'pose he went to see her from time to time, but I'm not sure. You can't find out much about Philippe. He's a queer one. He does exactly what he likes. Oh, he can be sweet and all that, but as for doing what he's told—nothing doing. He always does what he likes. Independent, as they say. I can't blame him, he's just like me. At his age, I was damned independent, too. Oh, I gave my family plenty of trouble, I'll tell you. I couldn't stand being ordered about. Not even given good advice. If someone had said 'Turn to the right, the road is less muddy,' I'd have turned to the left, just to prove I could do what I wanted. If the Pope had come with his crosier, his tiara, and the works, to say to me: 'Fernande, down on your knees,' I would have answered: 'Pius XI, come some other time.' Well, Philippe's exactly like me. We've got liberty in the blood, like others have germs or something!"

"You call that liberty?"

"What is it then?"

"Mulish obstinacy. Conceit of the devil. You're no fool. But you're bestial. And so's your son. Just look at his face."

"That's right, insult me, insult my son. You've got some nerve. A bestial face, Philippe! *Merde, alors!* Have you often seen bestial faces like his? What would you call your mug, then?"

"Don't get so excited. Bestial does not necessarily mean ugly. When I say bestial, I mean energetic, brutal, all in one, know what I mean?"

"Good," she said, pacified. "All in one, that's true. Nothing complicated about la Fernande. Nor about Philippe either. We're not sissies. We go straight ahead; and if anything gets in our way, we either jump over it or crush it," she said, lifting her head.

"Une Force qui va . . ." quoted Darricade, in an ironical tone.

He smiled and came to sit on the arm of Mme Arréguy's chair.

"As a matter of fact have you come to make love or to talk about the vitality of the Arréguy's?" he said mockingly.

She unbuttoned her blouse and kicked off her shoes one after the other.

"I'm in the dumps," she said. "I feel low and miserable. Be nice to me."

"Yes, my idol," he said; he was lecherous and pompous at the same time.

She gave a short laugh, then rose and went into the bathroom next to the bedroom. He was undoing his shoelaces when the bell rang. Darricade froze. Mme Arréguy's tousled head appeared in the chink of the door.

"You won't open the front door, I hope?" she whispered.

"I don't know. I'll go and see who it is."

He went to the window, concealing himself behind the curtains.

"It's that old Balansun," he cursed. "He comes and makes a nuisance of himself every other day, ever since—" He fell silent and bit his lower lip.

"Well, it can't be helped. I won't see him."

But M. de Balansun, having rung the bell a second time, simply turned the door handle. His step sounded in the hall, then there were two loud knocks at the door of the bedroom. Darricade was furious; he signaled to Mme Arréguy to stay in the bathroom. Fernande's tousled head vanished like a jack-in-the-box. Darricade popped the "furs" into a wardrobe, pushed the shoes with their Louis XV heels under a chair and went to sit behind his desk.

"Come in!" he shouted angrily.

M. de Balansun appeared. Darricade had already prepared a cutting phrase on the impertinence of importunate intruders, but when he saw the little old man's face—thin, hollow cheeked, ravaged—the words stuck in his throat. He was too shocked to speak.

"Monsieur Darricade," said the Count, in a voice that had lost its fine ring and no longer increased its volume in sudden outbursts, "I beg you to pardon this boldness. I did not wait for you to answer before I forced

my way into your house. I am a prey to the most intolerable torments. I had to speak to you without delay."

"Sit down," said Darricade. "It's about Francis, I suppose?"

"Alas!" said the Count. "It is about Francis, that is so."

He let himself sink into an easy chair.

"*Mes genoux tremblants se dérobent sous moi,*" he recited.

M. de Balansun had uttered this quotation without thinking, quite spontaneously. Even though his voice had lost its former authoritative ring, nothing in the world could dislodge the psychological reactions and verbal mannerisms of so many years' standing, which were now completely natural and instinctive. In M. de Balansun's case, the marionette had gained the upper hand; the assumed personage had ousted the man himself.

Darricade folded his hands on his desk. He looked worried. He was afraid that Mme Arréguy, overhearing their conversation, might guess certain things he had succeeded in concealing from her up till now. He felt disposed to cut old Balansun's lamentations short, and above all, to prevent anything definite being mentioned. He gave a little cough and said, "I am very much afraid that I will not be able to do anything for you, Monsieur de Balansun. I understand your grief, as well as that of the other families in Saint-Clar who have suffered the same trials. But, with the best will in the world, what can I do about it? Mme Costellot has promised to contact the German authorities. Now you must just wait. I am sure you will have news of your boy in a month or two."

M. de Balansun uttered a little moan. "Darricade," he said in a toneless voice, "a new event has occurred which, in my mind, has overthrown the hypothesis of deportation to Germany. For the last three days I have been living a nightmare of unspeakable horror. Did you read the *Patriote des Pyrénées* on Tuesday last?"

"Yes, I think so," said Darricade in a surprised tone. "But I did not notice anything special."

M. de Balansun drew a newspaper from the inner pocket of his coat. He unfolded it and handed it to Darricade, pointing to a paragraph at the bottom of the second page. Sitting very straight on the edge of his chair, he watched the engineer's face with intense distress.

Darricade read the paragraph without moving a muscle, folded the paper and handed it back to M. de Balansun.

"I understand," he said in an expressionless voice, "that you might have drawn conclusions. The dates co-ordinate approximately, as does the victim's age, and that is enough to trouble a mind already dis-

traught with anxiety. But when you look at the matter dispassionately, this assumption seems to me to be completely invalid. Why and how should your son fall into the hands of a sadistic madman, in a *pignada* outside Bordeaux, when he was going to that city to hear lectures at the law school and had only a few hours at his disposal? You must admit that it is inconceivable. No, no, Monsieur de Balansun, you are wrong to dwell on these ideas. To me the whole business seems quite simple: a German *razzia* takes place at the Saint Jean station in Bordeaux: a score of young men from the southwest are arrested, among them three boys from Saint-Clar, who were going to Bordeaux that day for different reasons. Your son was one of those unfortunates. It's all quite clear and simple; there is no room for doubt. As to the distressing news item you have just shown me, all I can say is that it is a coincidence, curious and sinister, but nevertheless a coincidence."

M. de Balansun had listened attentively. He nodded a few times and seemed to hesitate.

"Monsieur Darricade, I should like nothing better than to believe what you say. But you have overlooked one detail—a detail that to me appears to be of vital importance. My son was to have caught the 6:30 express as usual. But we know the *razzia* took place at about eight o'clock. The Chasseiux and Lescoumes boys were on the 8:10 train."

"But don't you see, Francis missed the six thirty, that's all there is to it," interrupted Darricade impatiently. "That happens often enough, with the crowds at the stations these days. Why, I myself have been unable to get on the six thirty at Bordeaux, because there were too many people. That day Francis took the later train."

"He never missed it," said the Count. "This would be the first time. But there is something else."

"Something else?"

The Count was breathing with difficulty, as though oppressed by a great weight. He spoke in a broken voice, without looking at Darricade. He seemed afraid to see his apprehensions confirmed.

"I went to Bordeaux yesterday. I contacted the inspector who is investigating the matter. The victim had been mutilated in such a way that, as decomposition had also set in, it could not be identified. The body was no longer at the mortuary. It had been buried four days ago. But I was shown photographs. . . ." His voice broke into a kind of sob and he carried his hand to his eyes as though to ward off a vision of horror.

"Darricade, in that unrecognizable face it seemed to me that I recog-

nized my son's features." He fell back in his chair and hid his head in his hands. There was a silence. Darricade got up.

"Any victim of a sadistic crime resembles any other," he said coldly. "In photographs of that kind, one can imagine one recognizes anybody."

"Darricade," said M. de Balansun slowly, "maybe it is not a case of a sadistic crime."

The engineer started. He threw an anxious glance toward the door of the bathroom.

"What do you mean?"

"The police inspector told me that it might also be a case of an assassination of a . . . political nature, carefully camouflaged to look like a sadistic crime. Apparently that happens very frequently in France nowadays."

Darricade began to walk up and down the room.

"A thriller! A dime novel!" he exclaimed, raising his arms. "Pure melodrama! Why did you think your son? Besides, he had no real importance. Do you understand: none whatever! Why the devil should anyone have tried to get rid of him? It's ridiculous."

He stopped suddenly in front of M. de Balansun.

"I suppose you then felt impelled to tell the police inspector that Francis belonged to . . . ? I would not put it past you, you are so vain! What did you tell the inspector?" he said menacingly.

M. de Balansun raised his head. His lips were trembling. An unutterable sadness veiled his eyes.

"You can set your mind at rest, Darricade," he murmured. "I said nothing. They questioned me closely, but I said nothing. I feigned ignorance. You run no risk whatever. I thought of your safety."

The engineer shrugged his shoulders angrily.

"My safety!" he repeated. "It is not only a question of myself, but of many others. Some members of the police force are on our side, others are faithful to Vichy. It is quite possible that your inspector was laying a trap for you, trying to get you to talk."

"I do not think so," said the Count. "In any case, I did not talk of that, you can rest assured."

He rose to his feet with difficulty and buttoned the collar of his great-coat.

"Anyway," said Darricade, "the whole story is absurd. But if you insist that your son has been assassinated, why shouldn't it have been by a sadist?"

M. de Balansun turned round slowly, and stared at Darricade in amazement.

"Why not, after all?" repeated Darricade. While he was saying these words, his eyes wore a peculiarly perfidious expression.

M. de Balansun looked at him. Suddenly, a sort of shiver shook his bent old shoulders.

"I hardly dare to grasp your meaning," he murmured. "You wish to disclaim your responsibility and protect yourself at the same time. And in order to do so, you do not hesitate—" his voice choked. He paused a second, and concluded in a trembling murmur, "I have always trusted my fellow men. I had to reach my advanced age to discover the villainy of the human soul and that this world is a hell."

He walked to the door with halting steps and opened it. Before leaving the room, he turned once more to Darricade.

"I hope," he said, "that there are not many men like you in the ranks of the Resistance. Otherwise, I would pity the France of tomorrow."

He went out. The front door opened and closed again. The rain continued to beat against the windowpanes. A light step, Mme Arréguy has left her hiding place. She had done her hair. She put on her shoes in silence.

"What's come over you?" Darricade growled. "Are you going?"

She opened the wardrobe, put on her coat, and slipped into her gloves, very calmly. She raised her head.

"After this conversation," she said quietly, "I no longer want to— No, it's nipped all desire, just like that."

"You fool," he cursed. "Don't you see that he's a senile old idiot?"

"Yes," she said, "that may be. But, I see something else as well. I see that you're a very queer customer."

He seized her wrists brutally.

"What did you hear?" he said in a rage. "What stories are you going to tell now? It's serious, you understand. Look out if you . . ."

"That's quite all right," she said, still extremely calm. She drew her wrists away and looked at the engineer with a look compounded of loathing and scornful pity. "I've understood everything, I'm not a nitwit. But as the old man said to you, you needn't be afraid for your safety. I can hold my tongue. Sealed lips, that's la Fernande. Your safety is sacred to me, too, hero of the Resistance! Only when it comes to love, nothing doing. Nice, what you said to the old man. And so tactful. You really could not have thought of anything more likely to comfort him. I've often thought there must be something filthy in you.

Certain things you said to me about Philippe. Now, I know just how filthy. There's filth in me too, but not quite the same kind. So, when it comes to you-know-what, finished, Darricade. After all, you're just a bit too repulsive, you see—even for Fernande Arréguy."

Two Days Later

From M. de Balansun, Saint-Clar, to Hélène de Balansun, Paris.

My dear Hélène, we are still without news of your poor brother. But the Lescoumes and the Chasseiux have no news of their sons either. We must believe that the unhappy boys have been captured in that razzia at the station in Bordeaux and sent to Germany. You know that these arrests are made in a quite arbitrary manner. It is not necessary to tell you how unhappy your mother and I are. But we will not lose all courage, nor abandon all hope of seeing our little Francis again one day. I dismiss with horror every assumption except that of his arrest at the station in Bordeaux. I pray to God that Francis may be in Germany now, even under tragic conditions. For if he is there, and I will believe that he is there, he will come back to us when the war is over. It cannot last much longer. Be brave, my little Hélène. I have seen Mme Costellot. She has been extraordinarily good to us. She has promised to do all she can with von Brackner to obtain his intervention regarding Francis' release. Von Brackner is all-powerful in the General Staff of the southwest. She thinks she will succeed. Your mother and I both feel that she has revived our hopes. She is a worthy woman. I regret that I have often treated her rather cavalierly.

I am not writing any more today, my darling. Believe me, our trials will soon be ended. We must never give up hope. Fondest kisses from your loving father.

FEBRUARY—JUNE, 1944

I.

A FEW days later, Mme Arréguy went to see Mme Delahaye. She did not know her, but she had heard about her and her spiritualist séances. She went to see Cécile as she would have gone to a fortuneteller. She

introduced herself, excused herself volubly, and was very much the woman of the world. She was dressed up to the nines: she wanted to look her best when calling on "one of the high-ups." Beside her "furs" she was wearing a gray scarf, very classy, a Saint-Andrew's cross (a family heirloom) pinned to her breast, and even a turban hat according to the latest fashion, which made her look like a sultana on a spree.

Cécile received this unknown lady from Saint-Clar with her usual affability and courtesy. When she learned the motive of the visit—to obtain from the tilting table news of an ungrateful son, who had not written since January—she was enthusiastic. She manifested the kind of sympathetic and touched curiosity that a great initiate would feel on meeting, in a world darkened by ignorance and fanaticism, a soul-mate, a follower of the secret sect. Thus may two Rosicrucians have exchanged the fraternal accolade in the seventeenth century. Cécile Delahaye did not doubt for a moment that Fernande Arréguy was an agnostic by vocation, a virtual disciple of Mme Blavatsky, a fierce adversary of papist superstitions, who had been attracted to the light of spiritualism as the mystic is attracted to God. She made it her duty to enlighten her visitor. She gave the new disciple an exposé of the great tenets of the doctrine, brief, but powerfully condensed. She quoted Hermes Trismegistus, Pythagoras, the Orphic masters, Plotinus, his Sophia and his Eons, Albert the Great and his demonology, the Templars, Christian Rosenkreutz, the Theosophists, and Annie Besant. Mme Arréguy listened, wrinkling her brow. When the old lady paused for a second, she pointed to the little table and suggested, "What about having a try at it?"

They sat down, the table between them. Before beginning with the rite, Mme Delahaye inquired courteously whether Fernande had the fluid.

Fernande, who imagined that the magnetic fluid was in some way connected with the voluptuous temperament, assured her that she had enough and to spare of it. Cécile was delighted. She laid her delicate hands on the edge of the table, and assumed the concentrated, tragic expression of a sybil who feels her whole body transformed by the immanence of the god.

"I will call M. Tournemire," she confided to Fernande in an undertone. "He was a friend of my husband's. They were together at the Conservatoire. M. Tournemire usually comes when I call him."

He actually came. The table rose and knocked once. Fernande was deeply impressed. By a series of cleverly circumscribed questions, Cécile

elicited from Tournemire the information that Philippe was safe and well, living in Paris, not with his aunt, but at an hotel; he had been in serious trouble, but it was all settling down gradually, and they would hear from him soon.

"*C'est formidable,*" murmured Fernande. "It's terrific, this business. D'you think he never makes a mistake, that Tournebroche of yours?"

Cécile assured her that M. Tournemire, one of the most distinguished spirits of the astral world, had given her countless proofs of his perspicacity and foresight. Fernande felt reassured.

She took her leave. She thanked Cécile effusively. She would have liked to give her an immediate proof of her gratitude, to do her a favor, for instance. Suddenly, she remembered that she could indeed do just that.

"Say, dearie," she said familiarly, "that former maid of yours is a public menace! She's real poison. The things she says about you! You've got to watch out. If I were you, I'd have her hauled into the police station and I'd say, 'Now spit it out, if you dare!' You've got to frighten her. It's the best way to make her keep her trap shut."

Cécile, touched to the heart by this rough solicitude, confessed that she already knew that the unfortunate Berthe was spreading lies about her all over the town. This black ingratitude hurt her very much.

"Yes," said Mme Arréguy with decision, "lies, that's the word. Listen, dearie, I like you: I will be frank. She says that you were on intimate terms with your German."

Cécile turned scarlet. She protested: intimate terms? Besides, at her age, how could anyone suppose—

"Agreed," said Fernande. "But you know what people are like in this hole. I know them, the punks. Nothing but hypocrites and cowards. Skunks. They see evil everywhere. They lay into me, too. Sure, I'm a slut; I've been on intimate terms with a Boche—terms that weren't exactly maternal. But it's none of their business, is it? My private life's my own. But I can fight back if they attack me. With you, dearie, fighting isn't exactly your strong point, is it? Excuse me. I'm speaking frankly. It's better that way. . . . You just go on letting them abuse you. Well, I tell you, you can count on me. If I meet that Berthe one of these days, and she starts abusing you, I'll give her a smack in the puss she'll remember. Sure I'd do it, and how! You're a good person, and you've been decent to me. Fernande Arréguy is not ungrateful."

With these energetic words, she took her leave. Cécile told herself

that this future theosophist was still a little too deeply enmeshed in the toils of passion and not yet liberated enough from terrestrial servitude, but that her heart was good. And for Cécile that was a most important consideration.

2.

WINTER was ending with storms and gales. The food situation had never been so bad. Saint-Clar was very weary of the war and had ceased to take any interest in the military operations; the only exceptions were a few specialists with service stripes and some opinionated commentators. Otherwise nobody knew what was going on in Italy or Russia. The dashing personnel of the *Kommandatur* had left, headed by von Brackner; they had been replaced by morose functionaries. February, March, April, went by. Mme Costellot was very depressed. She abandoned her hopes of salvation for Europe and for France. If the world was set on its own destruction, well, let it! She would watch it go down, with the stoical sadness and the detached pity of a senator of ancient Rome witnessing the sack of the city by the barbarians. What if she too disappeared in the massacre? Bah! Everybody would be massacred. The Mongolians would sweep away the world with their sickle and crush it under the blows of their hammer. A Cassandra who had resigned herself to silence and self-effacement, she let the simple-minded talk. When the optimists raved about Eisenhower, the American Army, chocolate, cigarettes, and opulence, she merely shook her head with the pitying smile of she-who-knows-but-will-not-say. March—April—May. She became sentimental, for instance at the movies. The newsreels moved her to tears. Our bombed cities, these ruins, these unhappy people whose homes had been destroyed wandering among the debris—Pity for them! And how poignant the Return of the Prisoners, those brave poilus brought by train to the Gare du Nord: the crowd of friends and relations breaks through the police cordon and surges round them, a wife embraces her husband, the poilu's features are contracted by emotion and the baby smiles and holds out its little hands, like Astynax in the arms of Andromache. It was too much for Mme Costellot. She sobbed, tortured, crucified by her patriotism, her solidarity with France. But then the noble countenance of the Marshal appeared on the screen, the august, radiant countenance of the Marshal, savior of the country—alas, a useless savior!—and one could see the Marshal being acclaimed

by the delirious populations of Limoges, of Toulouse, of Clermont, welcomed by the school children—"suffer the little children to come unto me"—and one of them threw itself into those venerable arms, proudly holding out a bunch of cornflowers, poppies, and daisies, and the Marshal kissed the little angel—then indeed, Mme Costellot's emotion knew no bounds. Poor France! Brave, unfortunate people of France! Mme Costellot dabbed her eyes. She sighed. Her family noticed that she was becoming extraordinarily gentle. She was never heard to raise her voice or to indulge in cutting repartee. Her extraordinary gentleness extended to Jacques, to M. Lardenne, to everybody. She had abdicated, she effaced herself, she had become resigned. April—May. She effaced herself more and more. She shut herself up in the house. June. She longed to disappear.

The farther the Allies advanced in Italy and the Germans retreated, pursued by the Russians, the greater became the doses of digitalis consumed by M. Lardenne. On June 6, he had a heart attack. He lost weight. In June, he was seen in the streets of Saint-Clar bravely sporting the tie of the Pyrenean Ski Club, a British-style tie that was actually "made in England." At the Club, he recalled with emotion the vibrant words Marguerite had said to von Brackner. ("We would have welcomed you, von Brackner, . . . without the weapon you have here!") He hinted mysteriously at a certain visitor who had spent a night under his roof, a visitor whom Jacques had picked up on the Landes, one night in August. Hush! we must wait for the end of the war; the visitor would return to Saint-Clar and then the population would learn how certain patriots of the town had entertained him, kindly and bravely, *à la française*, under the very nose of a Prussian who had been completely hoodwinked. M. Lardenne related this anecdote in an unsteady voice, throwing imploring glances at his listeners. In August, 1944, when nearly all the Germans had left Saint-Clar, M. Lardenne divulged the visitor's name: David Horsman. He waved it like an oriflamme. Mme Costellot, shaking her head with gently mocking pity, quoted the gospel of the Passion, the denial of St. Peter, the crowing of the cock. One day she said to him with cold cynicism, "My poor Victor, you are wasting your time. It won't stop the red rabble from hanging you on a butcher's hook if they feel like it." "You will always have your little joke, Marguerite," moaned M. Lardenne, completely crushed.

In April, soon after the séance at Cécile's, Mme Arréguy received a letter from Philippe. It was a very short and reticent letter, in which he told her to write to him at Aunt Eliane's, but without putting his name

on the envelope. Aunt Eliane would understand that it was meant for him. Philippe had signed the letter only with an initial. Mme Arréguy was immensely intrigued. What was going on? What had he done this time, the little devil? Perhaps he was hiding so as not to be sent to the S.T.O. in Germany or to Todt? Yes, that must be it. In any case, he was alive. She breathed again. Now she could wait patiently for the end of the war.

About the same time, Mme Arréguy received a little parcel with no return address, stamped with the Saint-Clar postmark. It contained a hempen rope. She understood the allusion and became intensely depressed. Why were they after her? What did they want of her? Why were they accusing her? She had never informed against anyone. She had never done any harm to anybody. She had slept with a Boche. So what? She had the right to seek distraction where she liked, didn't she? To live at Saint-Clar, and cook soup and polish the floors, day in, day out, for the old bald head who never said anything and looked at her like an ox. To live like this, far from Philippe, far from the only creature on earth, for whom she had affection and love, far from Philippe. Hadn't she the right to drown her sorrow, to seek distraction with a Boche, with the first comer, as long as he was clean, nice, and simple? Life was sad, too sad. Fernande would have thrown herself into the Gave, if she had thought she would never see Philippe again. One evening, after the old dodo had gone to bed, she sat down in front of a photograph of Philippe that showed him sitting on a rock in the middle of the Gave, clad in bathing trunks. She gazed at it for a long time. The house was surrounded by the night, lost in the silence and the darkness, lonely, so lonely. Fernande had laid her hands on her knees. Tears ran down her set face, and she made no attempt to wipe them away. And in front of her was Philippe with his smile, his vulpine eyes, the pure line of his shoulders, Philippe, indifferent and gay, on his rock.

A woman was gazing at Philippe that night, the living Philippe, but as remote as the boy in the photograph, enclosed in the secret universe of sleep. The slats of the Venetian blinds cast their shadows over the unmade bed, so that his chest appeared striped like the hide of a tiger. The woman lying beside him stared at him. Who was he? Where did he come from? He called himself Marcel Lefèvre, but she was sure it was a fake name; this was proved by the fact that in the beginning, when someone called him Marcel, he didn't move, he didn't seem to realize he was being addressed. He had been living at the Hôtel du

Levant for three months now. He didn't work—or at least, he never went out except at night. And why had he bleached his hair? It had been bleached with peroxide; you could see the black at the roots. Funny, a dark boy like that with blond hair. Marie-les-belles-châsses (the woman was known by this nickname between Barbès and Pigalle) had immediately been very intrigued by this young man. At first, she had taken him for "one of those," because of his peroxidized hair; but it wasn't that. As soon as they had slept together, she knew it wasn't that. Now, she didn't care, he'd got under her skin, she was crazy about him. All the money she picked up, between Barbès and Pigalle, was for him. Marcel or not Marcel, he was her man, and that was enough. She hadn't asked questions. She felt pretty sure it wasn't on the level, a guy who never budged from his hotel and bleached his hair. She felt sure there was some dirty business with the cops after him, perhaps what the newspapers called "a sordid crime." Marcel was hiding, digging himself in. Never mind, he was her man. Marie-les-belles-châsses was forty. At her age, a lover like Marcel was a windfall. He was her bully and her little baby, her kid, her brat—all in one. She loved to look at him asleep, striped like a tiger by the shadow of the blinds. Her little sleeping tiger.

3.

NATURALLY, M. de Balansun had not spoken to his wife about the news item he had read in the paper. It was his horrible secret. But he avoided thinking about it. His visit to Darricade, despite the latter's attitude, had reassured him up to a point. Actually not a soul in Saint-Clar, with the exception of very trustworthy friends (Cécile and her son) knew anything about Francis' activities, so how could the boy have fallen into the hands of the German or the Vichy police? Of course the premise of a sadistic crime was unlikely; as Darricade had said, it was too far-fetched. No: Francis had certainly been arrested in the razzia at Bordeaux, together with the two other young men from Saint-Clar. The Count had made up his mind to hope against hope. You can't go on living with the uncertainty of a horrible secret gnawing into your brain and heart; the human organism automatically rejects what threatens to destroy it. As week after week went by, each day brought a new reason for believing in the speedy end of the war; little by little as the night shortened, nights that since January had become one long nightmare

for him, M. de Balansun felt hope and confidence returning. Before his departure, von Brackner had promised Mme Costellot to make inquiries about Francis. Everybody in Saint-Clar was convinced that the young man had been deported to Germany. No one had suspected for a minute that the victim mentioned in the *Patriote des Pyrénées* might possibly be Francis. The Count had convinced himself that his paternal anxiety had unhinged his mind and made him recognize the features of his son in the swollen and unrecognizable face he had seen on the photographs at the police station. And yet, a tenacious doubt remained that could not be dispelled. M. de Balansun would still wake up with a start in the middle of the night, faced with the ghastly vision of that face covered with blood, deformed by blows, with one eyelid half open over a sightless eye.

In mid-April, shortly before Easter, a man came to call on M. de Balansun. Gérard, who was spending the holidays at Saint-Clar, happened to be there. He had called on the Count to inform him that he had approached the Japanese Legation in the matter, and that it seemed that his efforts might be successful. In the middle of this conversation the man arrived. He held out his hand to M. de Balansun. "Don't you recognize me?" he said. "I'm Pierre Martineau, your son's friend."

"The Mohican!" exclaimed the Count.

An hour later, Gérard left the Balansuns' house, with the Mohican. They went to a *café* to have a drink together. The Mohican appeared to be lost in thought.

"If I had known that I would have to break the news to him, I would not have come back to see him," he said. "It's over a year now since it happened. Why didn't they know anything about it?"

"I believe that the young man had no relations except a very old grandmother who lives in the Free Zone. Perhaps she has not even been notified. And if she has, she may not have written—or her letter may not have arrived. These things happen nowadays."

"I thought they knew all about it. I'd promised the kid to come and see him when I returned to France—so I come back. The old man knows nothing, and the kid's in Germany. I feel kind of sick about the whole thing. Nothing happens the way you hope it will. Especially these days."

They remained silent for a few minutes.

"There's one thing I didn't want to tell them," the Mohican said suddenly. "I didn't have the heart to mention it, the poor old man was upset enough as it is. I'll tell you, as you are an old friend of the family.

Somebody's got to know. You can tell the girl about it or not, it's up to you. But somebody's got to know."

He was fidgeting and twisting his hands on the edge of the table. He did not know how to begin. At last he burst out.

"Here it is— I sort of camouflaged the truth just now. It wasn't an accident. The Spitfire was flying too high, the antiaircraft shells were exploding six hundred feet below it. Then, at a given moment, the boys in the bomber saw the Spitfire dive straight at one of the searchlights below, one of the searchlights of the AA battery. It went full speed into a nose dive. Everything was smashed. But it wasn't an accident. It was on purpose."

Gérard felt his heart pounding harder and harder. His eyes were riveted on the closed, expressionless face of Francis' friend.

"Then there's another thing," the Mohican continued. "The same morning, two hours before the squadron took off, the Lavoncourt boy had received a letter. I was there, in our ready room, as usual. I saw his face while he was reading the letter. That's all."

4.

"No," said the concierge, "Mlle de Balansun is not at home. She goes out a lot, these days. She comes home late. It isn't worth waiting for her."

"Haven't you any idea where I might find her?" asked Gérard.

"How should I know? Mlle de Balansun doesn't confide in me. She comes in, she goes out. Bonjour, madame, she says, and that's all. She receives her friends, they leave at eleven, just in time to catch the last subway. When they don't stay all night," she added with a peevish air. "I don't like that much. But after all, she pays her rent regularly, and on the whole, she's a decent person."

"Could you tell me whether she will be at home tomorrow evening?" interposed Gérard.

"I could not, monsieur. Ah, a year ago I could have told you. Mlle de Balansun led a regular life then. But for some time now, all that has changed. Yes, it's changed all right. But, there it is, the private life of the tenants is not my business. All I ask is that they shouldn't turn the house into a brothel, if you'll pardon the expression, monsieur. The house has always had a good name and—"

"Will you be so kind as to inform Mlle de Balansun that I called on

her," Gérard interrupted dryly. "Tell her that I will come again tomorrow evening. It is urgent."

He slipped a bank note into the concierge's hand.

"Thank you, monsieur. Listen, I can tell you that Mlle de Balansun often goes to Elysées 82-95. All you need do is to find out the address from the telephone exchange. I know, because she often rings up Elysées 82-95. She telephoned there this morning. I understand that she was invited for this afternoon."

"Good," said Gérard. "With your permission, I will use the telephone."

Two minutes later, the address in hand, he was taking the subway.

He had not seen Hélène since Christmas. He had been too busy, the last three months, to arrange a meeting, and she had not given him a sign of life either. Their friendship was slowly petering out into indifference. Gérard was surprised to find that he was detaching himself from her so easily. Since Christmas, he had not thought of Hélène. His new life, which was so unexpected, strange, and thrilling, was liberating him from his sterile past. Hélène was part of that past.

He pondered on what the concierge had told him. He made allowances for the spiteful exaggerations, the petty distortions that are to be expected from concierges, a very particular breed of people. Nevertheless, there was sure to be some truth in all this gossip. What sort of a life was Hélène leading? Who were her friends? Wouldn't it have been better to wait and see her alone some other day? However, aside from the natural desire to carry out quickly his unpleasant duty, he was moved by a rather low curiosity to see how Hélène would react. "In a short time, I'll know. Perhaps I'll understand. Anyway, I'll be able to clear up some points."

He came out of the subway. The afternoon was fine and sunny. He walked quickly. "I hope she's here," he said to himself as he climbed the stairs of the apartment house. He arrived on the landing of the floor tenanted by Mlle Jane Cosma, the subscriber to the telephone number Elysées 82-95. Bursts of dance music came from the apartment. "*A thé dansant* or a 'surprise party,'" he thought. He rang several times. At last the door opened. He heard a jazz tune and the noise of gay voices.

"Is Mlle de Balansun here?"

"I will find out," said the maid. "Please come in, monsieur."

Gérard waited in the little lobby, which was furnished in an ultra-

modern style. He was slightly nervous. A blonde young woman appeared; she was very well dressed and fairly good looking.

"You are a friend of Hélène's," she said, holding out her hand cordially. "Come in. My name's Jane. All Hélène's friends are mine, too. We are dancing and drinking."

"I am terribly sorry," he said. "I have news for Mlle de Balansun. If you could be kind enough to send her out to me."

The young woman raised her eyebrows. "It's nothing serious, I hope? You are not going to take her away from us?"

He shook his head dubiously.

"It will be for her to decide."

"I'll call her," said the young woman.

The lobby door opened and closed again. There was apparently a large crowd in the adjoining room. Gérard felt increasingly ill at ease. "This is awful. To come to tell her this news in such a place. As always, Hélène and I are absurdly out of step." He began to walk up and down. A burst of music warned him that the door had been opened again. He turned round. Hélène stood before him.

She was wearing a flowered dress with a very short skirt and a Tyrolean bodice, and white platform shoes, high, and massive like buskins. Her hair was brushed up from the nape of her neck and curled down over her eyebrows.

Her make-up was as elaborate as a movie star's. Heavy bracelets encircled her wrists. With this coiffure, these clothes, these ornaments, she had become a different person, very different from the Hélène Gérard had been expecting to see. She held a cigarette between her fingers.

"How did you know I was here?" she asked coldly.

"Your concierge told me."

"Have you got something to tell me?"

"It would be better if we went out."

She shook her head impatiently.

"No, here. Tell me, quick! What is it about?" An expression of anguish convulsed her features. She murmured, "Francis?"

"No, there is nothing new about Francis," he said quickly. "Everything points to his having been sent to Germany. The inquiries which are being made look hopeful. It is neither about Francis nor about your parents."

The wail of the saxophone and the muffled steps of the dancers could be heard from the adjoining room.

"Please tell me," said Hélène. "What is it about?"

"A dead man."

She leaned against the wall. She had become very pale.

"Philippe?" she gasped.

“Who?”

He was riveted to the spot, stunned, incapable of moving. He stared at her with a drawn expression.

"It's not Philippe," she murmured. "Of course, I'm a fool, you couldn't know—" She paused, and then asked in a small flat voice, "It's Jean, isn't it?"

He nodded. She closed her eyes for a second. A burst of music— The blonde young woman appeared.

"Excuse me," she said, glancing at Gérard. Then she took Hélène's arm and asked, "It's nothing serious, is it, darling? I was a bit worried . . ."

"No," said Hélène weakly. "It's nothing."

Gérard stared at her, fascinated. The lobby door closed again. They were once more alone. Hélène had dropped her cigarette, which was burning out on the floor. She went to a chair, sat down, and dropped her head between her hands. Little by little, she seemed to crumple up and wilt in her chair. Gérard opened his mouth. He was surprised at the hoarse sound of his own voice.

"Why did you think that it was . . . Philippe Arréguy?"

She did not answer immediately. She dropped her hands from her face. She was very pale. She stared fixedly at a point in space.

"Didn't you guess?" she said in an indifferent tone. He looked at her with the same expression that Francis had had, three months earlier, on the evening of the Fair: an incredulous, stunned, horrified expression. He felt as though he were hearing an intolerably strident sound, piercing him like a borer. Hélène and Philippe Arréguy. It was monstrous. It was pure madness.

"How did you hear about it?" she asked.

He had to pull himself together before he could answer.

"Through a friend of Francis', who just came back from England. He knew Jean. He came to your house. Your father asked me to tell you about it. He didn't have the courage to write to you."

"When did it happen?"

She had turned her head slightly. Gérard could see only her profile, now strange and unfamiliar because of her new way of doing her hair, a profile as impassive as an engraving on a medal.

"It happened last year, at the end of March."

"The end of March?" she exclaimed in a muffled voice. "Oh, my God."

She crumpled up even more in her chair. Gérard could not take his eyes off her strange, rigid profile.

"How did it happen?" she asked.

He hesitated. He remembered what Francis' friend had said: "You can tell the girl or not, it's up to you." Nothing on earth compelled him to tell her how it had happened. There was not the slightest need for it. M. de Balansun believed it to have been an accident. Gérard could easily lead Hélène to believe the same. Yet, almost in spite of himself, the words formed on his lips, "He killed himself of his own free will."

The profile was still set like an engraved medal, but a tremor had gone through her body, like the effect of a shock. Gérard looked at Hélène with an intense, troubled curiosity. "Now," he told himself, "I am beginning to understand everything. But I want proof. And there is no reason why I should spare this slut."

Very carefully he uttered the words, "That morning, he had received a letter. That letter seems to have been the immediate cause of his suicide."

She did not move. From the room next door came the sounds of breathlessly syncopated music, the rhythmic hammering of the dance, laughter, the voice of a Negro woman singing: "*Hold tight, hold tight, mummy. . .*" It was completely grotesque. "It doesn't make sense," he told himself, "or maybe it is all a nightmare." Philippe Arréguy, Hélène . . . Jean's suicide. A letter. The frenetic dancers next door. Philippe, a little blackguard of eighteen, and Hélène. The plane nose diving into the searchlights of the AA battery. Hélène and her bizarre hair-do "*à la zazou*." A letter. The plane crashes. Hélène's impassive profile. The dancers next door. Philippe, a vulgar little guttersnipe of eighteen, ten years younger than Hélène. The crashed plane, a burst of flame. And a hysterical Negro yelling "*Hold tight, hold tight, mummy!*" next door. Completely grotesque.

He went up to Hélène and touched her shoulder.

"Don't you want to come away?" he asked.

A few minutes later, they were walking along the sunny avenue.

"Would you like me to take you home?" asked Gérard.

He was amazed at feeling nothing in particular. After the first minute of stupor, nothing remained except embarrassment and a slight distaste. He was in a hurry to have it all over and done with. He forced

himself to imagine Hélène and Philippe Arréguy together. It wasn't easy. Philippe Arréguy, a repulsive little gigolo, a second-rate scoundrel who lives by his wits, who would do anything from procuring to prostitution, taking theft and illicit trading by the way. Unscrupulous, ruthless, grasping, like so many of his generation today, his very aspect made you feel nauseated. Gérard repeated to himself, "She sleeps with Philippe Arréguy."

He did not attempt to understand, to reconstitute one by one the links of the mysterious chain that led from the young girl from Saint-Clar, the young Hélène, to this despicable creature, the "bright young thing" of 1944 who "got herself" a gigolo. He was conscious of neither jealousy nor suffering, merely of a distaste, which was almost physical, the kind of embarrassment one feels in the presence of morally vulgar people, the recoil that results from a contact with something base and second rate. On leaving the house, he had automatically taken Hélène's arm, as had been his habit when they were walking side by side. Now he withdrew his arm. This woman beside him, this painted woman with her high-heeled shoes, her eccentric dress, her complicated hair-do—what had she in common with Hélène? This was a stranger, a mannequin in the Champs Elysées style, a specimen of the new breed known as "zazou." No, she had nothing in common with Hélène, they were two quite distinct creatures. He was impatient to have done with the stranger. The history of this woman left him profoundly indifferent. Gérard had never been interested in amorous intrigues, betrayals, adultery, sentimental duplicity, and all the rest of it, for he found it impossible to imagine the kind of people who did that sort of thing. All that, to him, was as alien and remote as something taking place on Sirius. The sort of thing that might interest the concierge, or the spectators of plays by Bernstein, or the readers of *Notre Cœur*. That Hélène had betrayed her fiancé with an eighteen-year-old gigolo was possible, it was actually certain, but it left Gérard completely indifferent: it was a vulgar, smutty little intrigue suited for the letters' column of a woman's magazine or a boulevard theater. He did not want to have anything to do with it. Hélène was an inhabitant of Sirius. He did not even wish to know the details of the story, he was no longer in the least curious about it. He was only impatient to be through with the whole thing, not to have to walk any farther beside this painted woman whose proximity embarrassed him. "It is Hélène," he told himself, "my amazon." But there was neither rancor nor sarcasm left in him, only an ocean of indifference, topped with the light foam of distaste.

"I'm a stinking prig!" he suddenly said to himself. "She only has to step down from the pedestal of utter nobility—where I placed her myself expecting her to remain there forever—and I make her wallow in an abyss of vulgarity. I pose as a man free of all prejudices, I defend total individual freedom, the absolute right of the individual to act as he pleases and to indulge in any experience. In theory, I accept in others every kind of daring, every kind of erotic sentimental behavior; I live in an enlightened century, I have read all our great *avant-garde* writers, I am a passionate partisan of individual liberty. I abstain from judging, from condemning. But in the only girl that I have loved genuinely and deeply, I wanted at any price to see the proud amazon, the miracle of chastity, reserve, poise, uncompromising nobility—the pure maiden of a Victorian novel. And I only loved her because I saw her as that. Intellectually and on the surface, I am a modern, emancipated young man. Actually, I am a contemporary of François Coppée. In the old days I used to tease Hélène and recite: '*Irène de Grandfief, la noble et pure enfant . . .*' Well, for me she was actually Irène de Grandfief, the ideal of the Victorian era: the convent-bred girl who plays Bach and arranges the flowers in a salon style Louis Philippe. . . . Today, just because she has put into practice the moral and sensual liberty that I defend, she is engulfed by vulgarity, she becomes an inhabitant of Sirius, I cannot despise her enough. Yes, I'm a stinking prig . . ."

They had not uttered one word during their walk. When they arrived in front of Hélène's house, Gérard mumbled some vague polite commonplaces, the kind of things one says when one is in a hurry to finish with an unpleasant task. ("If I can be of any service to you, do not hesitate. . . . I am entirely at your disposal.") He did not wait for the answer, shook Hélène's hand without even looking at her and left her, walking away rapidly.

5.

"THERE is no earthly reason why you should go on living in this room," said Jacques Costellot. "It's too depressing. Besides, you won't be working at the laboratory any more."

He stretched out an arm to the little table beside the bed; a bottle of champagne and two glasses were set on it. He filled a glass for himself. A bedside lamp lit up the top part of the bed and the bare, slightly sunburned chest of Jacques Costellot, who was leaning against the wooden

headboard; beside him lay Hélène, one bare shoulder showing through the tresses of her long fair hair, and one slender, nervous arm extended along the eider down. The remainder of the room was in the shadow. Through the window, wide open onto the courtyard, came the warm, drowsy air of the June night.

Jacques drank his champagne and put the glass back on the table.

"Would you like to smoke?" he asked.

"No."

"Would you like to sleep?"

"It's all the same to me."

He lit a cigarette and remained silent for a few minutes. He kept his eyes fixed on the lighter square of the window. Then he began to speak again, in a slow voice, low and as though purposely devoid of expression. There were long, dreamy pauses between his sentences.

"You haven't asked me yet why I came to see you, why I wanted—this. You are strangely free from curiosity. Another girl, in your place, would have asked any number of questions. After all, nothing could have made you think that I was remotely interested in you. I come to Paris about every three months, and have done so for ten years, yet I never called on you. We have known each other ever since we can remember. We studied the same things; we used to see each other often during the holidays while we were growing up. With the good Gérard! Except for making an occasional pass, which was sometimes a game, sometimes just to be polite—when you were invited to my house, for instance—I have never shown the slightest interest in you. And yet you interested me. You interested me because of something I sensed in you, something endangered and pathetic. At times I have even desired you, when you weren't—forgive me!—dressed in those awful clothes. I desired you; you were something rather exceptional. Your touching efforts to be always a 'nice girl,' your archaic pride, your stiffness, your strait-laced attitude. All that was rare enough to attract me. I like people with high-flown ideals. However, it might have become boring in the end; and I must confess that you have bored me at times—especially one day when you decided to make me understand and admire Peguy, I think it was, or it may have been Claudel. Also, your scout leader, Girl Scout side, frankly got on my nerves. When I was eighteen, I would willingly have traveled around the world to avoid spending an hour with a scout, or someone connected with the youth movement or anything like that. When I saw you, in town, at the head of a troop of little girls in uniform who were yelling a marching song, I felt really sorry for you. But

I still respected you. That's the funny part, because I promise you that with me, respect and pity seldom go hand in hand. Yes, come to think of it, you might have been a deadly bore. But there was something else about you. A hatred of complacency, a disinterestedness, a truly aggressive modesty—that's a pat phrase, but it suits you perfectly—a half-conscious contempt for old-fashioned morals, although you still respected and clung to the standard and accepted values; yet, sometimes, in spite of yourself, you would show your contempt by violent outbursts. Then I felt close to you. And I also liked you very much when I saw you trembling and defenseless, frightened at the idea that the fine edifice of faith and virtue you had built around you might not be so very solid after all. For instance, that day we discussed the 'meaning of life'—how pretentious we must have been, at twenty!—and I amused myself by upsetting you and luring you on with trite phrases like 'Time passes,' 'You're only young once,' 'Truth is beauty,' and all the old hedonistic clichés. And another time, when I had lent you that book *Saul*. I still remember the tone in which you said, when you gave it back to me the next day: 'It is quite horrible.' It was quite horrible, but you had read it feverishly, in one evening. It fascinated you, the story of old Saul. And you quoted a certain phrase. '*Wherewith shall man comfort himself for his fall, except with that which has led to his fall?*' and then you added, as if you were unwillingly admitting to something: 'It's horrible, because I feel that it's true—' That day, I desired you very much."

He remained silent for a long time. Then he said, "And yet that phrase was not quite true. Because you must know now that, for people like us, whatever we may do, there is no fall."

He crushed his cigarette in the ash tray and then laid his hand on that of the young woman, which still lay inertly on the eider down, lifeless and abandoned. Without turning his eyes from the window, he continued, "At the end of the summer, you'll come back to Saint-Clar. I'll get a job for you, it doesn't matter what, something easy and not too boring. For form's sake. As a concession to public opinion. We'll see each other often. We'll meet elsewhere, in Paris or in other places, with all necessary discretion—still as a concession. I can get away from home whenever I like, and I am rich. Very rich. You won't have any more material worries, I'll see to it. We'll be happy. You needn't worry about Gisèle's feelings. If I didn't betray her with you, I'd betray her with some other woman. Besides, Gisèle is happy, with just enough suffering and sorrow, from time to time, to make her appreciate her happiness

when she has it. And finally, Gisèle is not a person worth worrying about. Even if we were robbing her of her happiness, we would be justified in placing ours before hers. But we are not robbing her of anything. The little I give her is enough to overwhelm her."

He was stroking the young woman's hand very softly, with the tips of his fingers.

"To do this, we'll have to act a part for appearances' sake. You'll soon get a peculiar pleasure out of it concealing one side of your life from the world. This pleasure becomes so great that soon you can't do without it. It is a feeling of liberty, of protection, of being different from the common herd. There are two ways of asserting your liberty. One is to scream from the rooftops, to defy the universe, to flaunt yourself and confess everything, becoming a martyr to absolute truth. The other consists of apparently conforming, taking advantage of the benefits of this behavior without ever assuming any of its responsibilities. In the first case you tell the truth because you don't like lying. In the second, you lie because you don't like those who make a fetish of the truth. Or sometimes out of consideration for them as well: but that kind of consideration necessarily carries with it a certain measure of contempt. Please understand I don't object, fundamentally, to certain things being known, especially the fact that you are my mistress. But there'd be various domestic scenes à la Dumas *films*. Why not avoid these scenes when it's so easy to avoid them? I have a horror of melodrama. But if it has got to come to that, well, let it. Also, although I'm rich and appreciate all the privileges of wealth—if I have to be poor one day, well, let me be poor. I want to enjoy the things I have, but remain detached enough to be able to hold my head up when they're gone."

He appeared to ponder for a few seconds.

"They may well be taken away from me. It's quite possible that the end of the war will bring about a considerable social upheaval, which would affect me, naturally. For instance, I might be completely ruined. Or worse still, it might mean prison, torture, who knows . . . ? You probably know that I'm considered a collaborator in Saint-Clar. I believe the people hate me, not so much because they suspect me of being a collaborator, but because they know I am rich and at the same time, think I am a collaborator. To be rich and a collaborator is really the limit. I have never taken the trouble to set them straight, to proclaim my neutrality . . . These worthy people are so barren of thought and emotion that it would take a heart of stone to rob them of an excuse for hating . . . So, I don't think it is too unrealistic to foresee, among pos-

sible future events, the possibility of being imprisoned or even shot in the street. I hope they won't amuse themselves by carrying my head around on a pike. I have a horror of melodrama, but even more of a fair."

He began to laugh softly.

"My father-in-law is absolutely terrified at the idea of the approaching liberation. He already sees himself as the *Princesse de Lamballe*, or as one of those impaled wretches drawn by Goya. Poor man. By dint of lacking dignity, he has ended up by acquiring the eminent dignity of sheer funk. How relieved he will be, when the day of liberation comes, to find that nothing happens! It amuses me to foresee imprisonment or the firing squad, because you have to prepare for everything and never allow yourself to be taken by surprise. You have to try to outguess destiny, and then you'll believe anything will happen. To have anything happen, those who are now secretly preparing their revenge would have to be united. But they're not. When the Germans have been driven out, you will see the mad rush for power, the hubbub of the newly created parties, the disordered state of French democracy, the insults—'Commie spy' and 'neo-Fascist'—shouted at each other by the same men who today are fighting together against the Occupation. No, I am quite sure, I will be neither imprisoned nor shot. Perhaps I will be insulted by some drunken patriots of Saint-Clar. I'll slap a few of them, in the face, and that will be the end of it."

He took a deep breath of the night air.

"Do you want to go to sleep? It is nearly one o'clock. Come to the window for a moment, will you?"

He got up, bent over the young woman and picked her up in his arms. They crossed the room. Their silhouettes stood out against the pale blue square of sky. He supported Héléne with his arm around her waist. She laid her head on his shoulder. They were both tall and slender, both of them beautiful human beings.

"For a week now, we have spent part of each night standing at this window. It was the first time . . . How easy it all has been! I never thought it would be so easy . . . Everything happened as though you had always been waiting for me."

Gently, he pressed her body against his own. They remained silent, and then he continued, in the same slow, low, dreamy voice, "I'm rich. And we will be isolated in my wealth and our secret. Our secret. I don't say: our love. And yet I love you, as much as I can love anyone. When I decided to come and see you a week ago, it was pure curiosity.

I wasn't even sure whether I desired you very much. I saw you. You didn't tell me about—about what had happened, and what I could read in your face, in the circles under your eyes. You acted and spoke as though—the man who is dead had never existed. You were rigid with a harsh and defiant courage. I admired that acceptance of your acts with all their consequences. It was not the remorse, the tears, the abjection of Saul, but the hard courage of an angel who has chosen to destroy himself. That's why I said just now that for us, no matter what we do, there can be no fall."

He bent his head and kissed the white shoulder gleaming faintly in the half light.

"I love you, truly. As for you, I don't know whether you love me; and it doesn't matter very much, yet. But I know that our bodies love each other, and that does matter. We have a great chance of happiness. I use the word happiness, but there is no word for the thing I mean, which is something beyond happiness. We will be lovers and accomplices. We will always understand each other . . . The possibility of saying everything, and always being understood, of remaining silent, and again being understood. That is wonderful. That's what I needed, a woman who would be, in a way, a friendly accomplice, a second self. Why did it take me so long to realize that you could be that woman, that you alone could be that woman? How could I stand living as I did, in complete solitude surrounded by all the pleasures and satisfactions that a man could wish for? But at last I've found you, and we're still young. No more loneliness. We will never be lonely again, either of us. You will have no one in the world but me. I will have no one in the world but you. And we'll snatch everything we want from this world, which may wallow in stupidity, or possibly in blood, but we will take all that it has left to offer. And as nothing can be refused us, one day we'll have a son. If you wish it. I have always wanted a son. Because I love you, I want you to give me that son. He will be our victory, when we are too old and weary to be victors ourselves."

Leaning against the window sill, he lifted his head to the square of sky, a dark sky studded with stars. An almost imperceptible breeze moved the leafy branches.

"Listen to the silence of this night. At this very minute, all over the world, men are preparing themselves. Thousands and thousands of mysterious things, thousands and thousands of horrors that we may never know, are being carried out tonight, in the name of some truth or of some lie. Men are suffering and dying, they are hoping, they are

waiting, they are afraid. The thoughts and actions of the living answer and mutually affect each other. An intangible link joins all men together, even those who hate each other and kill each other. But you and I, we are outsiders. To us, this night means nothing except that we are alone, that our bodies and our souls are as one, that we share our secret. Listen to the silence. We can almost hear the beating of our hearts. I feel as though we were abandoned, outside the world. Outlaws. Isn't it wonderful? I feel as though the wave of time had ebbed and left us stranded on the shore. . . .

A slow shudder went through her. He pressed her against him. He took her fair head between his hands.

"Are you cold? Come."

He carried her to the bed and stretched himself out beside her. He put out the lamp. Gently, he clasped her in his arms.

There was nothing more, except the imperceptible breath of the breeze outside. Nothing. Then, after a long silence, the low voice of the young man, "You must be surprised that I wanted . . . this. I'll tell you why; ever since that evening in December, at the Fair, when I happened to see your expression at the moment when young Arréguy passed by—"

He held her closer, and his voice became lower still. "Tell me that story. We are alone, stranded on the shore. And you'll be telling the story to yourself. Tell me about Philippe."

6.

THE NEXT day toward noon, Hélène and Jacques were walking through the hall of the apartment house. The concierge tapped on the glass to attract their attention. She came out of her quarters, her face flushed.

"They've come!" she cried. "They've landed! It's just been announced over the radio. They landed this morning, on the Normandy coast. Didn't I tell you, mademoiselle, that it would happen at the beginning of June?"

The same evening, they took a train in the direction of Bordeaux.

An Evening at the Beginning of August, 1944

Philippe was leaning against the wall of a house at a street corner. It was so dark that he couldn't be seen three yards away. Marie was standing close to him. They talked in low voices. Shadowy figures were still strolling up and down the boulevard. A small group of men was standing in front of the Café Dupont-Blanche, the blue light filtering through the windows shining on them; a few young men, the collars of their shirts wide open, ambled up and down the pavement in a detached manner. Algerians with faces like those in the police line-up were offering the passing crowd Gauloise cigarettes at a hundred francs a pack, under the eyes of a resigned policeman. It was just after eleven o'clock.

Suddenly Philippe seized the woman's hand.

"What's hit you?" she asked.

He was looking toward the group in front of Dupont-Blanche. She turned her head in the same direction. A young man was standing on the edge of the pavement, next to an Algerian. He was buying cigarettes. The blue light of the windows fell on his thin, sharp profile.

"Well?" asked Marie.

"Wait for me, I'll be back at the hotel in half an hour. I've got something to say to that guy. He's a pal of mine."

The young man with the sharp profile lit a cigarette and began to walk away. Philippe moved out of the dark corner where he had been concealed. Marie followed his tall silhouette with her eyes, watching his supple, slightly swinging gait. He was walking a few steps behind the man he had called his pal.

At Place Clichy, the man descended into the subway entrance. Philippe followed him. There was a crowd on the platform. Philippe did not get into the same car as the man, but into the one behind. Through the communicating doors, he watched the sharp profile, while taking good care to keep himself out of sight. He thrust his right hand into the pocket of his jacket, gripping the key of his hotel bedroom.

At the Porte de Clichy, he waited to get out until the man had passed along the platform, in the crowd. Then he jumped out. He followed the man whose blue silk scarf, knotted under the open collar of his shirt, formed a small, bright spot, visible in the midst of the crowd.

Outside, the night was almost pitch black. Beyond the buildings of Porte de Clichy, a vast stretch of waste ground, indistinct and dark,

stretched out to the approaches of Clichy. Philippe walked faster. The crowd had dispersed. A few yards ahead of him, only the young man with the blue scarf remained. He was walking rapidly, the heels of his shoes clicking against the pavement. Philippe was wearing rope-soled sandals. Holding his hand in the pocket of his jacket, he made the round end of the key stick out under the cloth. He was getting nearer to the young man. The latter obviously realized that he was being followed. He turned his head. Philippe was already close behind him.

"Keep moving," he said in a low voice. "But change your direction."

The young man stifled an exclamation. He stopped dead. "Get going or I'll let you have it," said Philippe. "To the left. Head toward the Fortifications."

He pushed the end of the key into the young man's back. The latter went on walking. They crossed the boulevard.

"What do you want me for?" asked Tony in a muffled voice.

"Just a little talk," said Philippe quietly. "Been a long time since I've seen you. You haven't changed. Still the schoolboy cutup."

They reached the flats. After about a hundred yards, Philippe put his left hand on the young man's shoulder.

"Stop."

With the same hand, he searched him rapidly, found a revolver and slipped it into his pocket.

"Always armed," he remarked. "You're right. It's wise. Especially in these days."

He sensed that Tony was trembling with terror. In the darkness he could hardly see his face. But he felt the overwhelming fear emanating from the body standing close to his own.

"You don't seem too happy about seeing your dear Philippe again," he said softly. "Too bad I've got to use all sorts of gangster tricks to have a little talk with you. The key in the ribs. Old pals like us, it's a shame. As though we didn't trust each other."

They were standing in the midst of vague rubble, in a vast zone of darkness. In the distance, you could distinguish the dark mass of the tall houses against the lighter sky.

"I think there's a shelter in this sector," said Philippe. "It must be on the left. Come on, we won't be bothered there."

He made a quick movement. Tony had leaped sideways in an attempt to get away. Philippe seized him by the collar of his shirt. "Lay off!" yelled Tony. "Help!"

A heavy hand came down on his mouth. He struggled for a few

seconds, panting and quick like a small wild animal. Then, little by little, he slid to his knees.

"Come on, where are your guts, my little patriot," murmured Philippe without a trace of sarcasm.

He began to drag him along, keeping a hand over Tony's mouth. He arrived in front of the shelter. Wooden steps led below ground. They went down, Philippe still dragging Tony, who was struggling and stumbling over the steps. In the passage of the shelter, the earth smelled damp. It was dark. The only sound was Tony's gasping, broken by hoarse sobs.

"Don't you like this place?" said Philippe. "And yet you always went in for shelters, in the days of Janson. But maybe you don't like remembering things like that?"

Tony flung his arms round him.

"Let me go, Philippe," he sobbed. "D'you want money? Tell me what you want. Anything you want. We're still buddies, Philippe. Tell me what you want."

Philippe shook him off without brutality.

"First some news. The boss?"

"We're leaving, Philippe. We're getting the hell out, the boss and I. And Allouche. We're making for Germany in three or four days. You can come with us, Philippe. Come. The boss has forgotten, you know. He isn't sore with you, you know. He was saying to me yesterday, 'I wonder what has become of our poor Philippe. Why shouldn't—'"

"O.K., I've got it. Now something else: my record. Where is it?"

Tony was panting now.

"Don't know, Philippe."

His voice rose, through all the modulations of fear, to the shrill note of panic.

"I don't know, Philippe, I swear I don't. I don't know! I don't know!"

"It doesn't matter," said Philippe with the greatest calm. "I was just asking. I know where it is. But it doesn't matter now. The record will get lost in Germany. And in a week's time, the Yanks will be here. I'm safe."

"Come with us, Philippe! We're still pals. What'll you do in Paris? Come with us."

"What'll I do in Paris? I've been dug in like a rat eight months now. What if you'd been able to smell out my hide out, huh! And tomorrow,

I know what you'll do: Put out a nice little dragnet between Clichy and Barbès."

"No. Philippe! Don't think that, Phil."

"Quit yapping. Nothing scares me now."

In the dark, there was a clicking sound, the slight clicking of small metal objects. Philippe was emptying the revolver. He slipped the bullets into the pocket of his trousers.

Silence. Then Tony's desperate voice, "Why are you doing that?"

"They didn't let me play with firearms when I was a kid," he said lightly.

A sigh. Again, Tony's voice. Through the note of despair sounded a forced lightness.

"I always knew you were a good guy, Philippe. I knew you weren't going to. We're pals, aren't we? You remember the trips we used to take?"

Philippe didn't answer. They were still standing close to each other. In the silence and the thick darkness, there was no sound except Tony's gasping breath. Suddenly, he recoiled and flattened himself against the wooden partition of the passage.

"No!" His voice was hoarse. Philippe moved forward. His hands, in the dark, were feeling for Tony's body. A roar. "No!"

Then Philippe's voice, very calmly, "Don't knock yourself out. Nobody's going to hear you. Revolvers can be heard. Not voices. Listen, Tony. You can take this little idea with you where you're going—you can't make a sucker out of Philippe Arréguy. Since Bordeaux, I've been waiting to put this idea across. P'raps you think I'm sore because of the kid you knocked off in Bordeaux. No. I don't give a damn about him. If you hadn't finished him off, someone else would have got him in later. The kid meant nothing to me. But I'd decided he wasn't going to get hurt. I had decided: d'you understand what that means? For a year you've been wanting to make a sucker out of me, you and Merkel. But I don't take orders unless it suits me. You can take that idea where you're going. And also the idea that life lines are all crap. My life line is short, so that made you feel good. But I'll tell you, I don't give a damn for life lines."

Quite close to him, he felt the presence of the tembling little body, crushed against the wooden partition. In the darkness, he felt the presence of the creature who was nothing but a panting mass of terror. He raised his hands, without haste.

There was a stifled scream, then the sound of a rapid, hand-to-hand struggle. A heavy fall. Philippe had let himself fall to the ground, dragging Tony with him. He was lying on top of Tony's convulsively quivering body, both hands gripping the boy's throat through the scarf that enveloped it. A hand was pressed against Philippe's face. Tony was trying to free himself by pushing up his arm. Philippe dug his teeth into the flesh of that hand and bit it furiously. He felt the sweat trickling down the back of his neck. He drove his thumbs deep into the boy's throat; the cartilages cracked. Tony's right leg kicked out suddenly, the shoe banged against the wooden partition. Philippe tightened his grip. He was lifted up by the terrible, convulsive jerks of Tony's body. A mysterious ecstasy was radiating through him, as though he were overcoming not a boy of twenty, but destiny itself, strangling his own fate in a desperate hand-to-hand struggle, in the dank darkness of the shelter. His entire being seemed to be emptying itself of its substance; the muscles of his thighs and his belly relaxed as after an orgasm. But his hands did not loosen their hold on Tony's fragile, palpitating neck, gripping with a gorillalike force. He felt himself become weak and languid, but he was hanging on these iron wrists, on the monstrous strength of his clasped hands that were no longer a part of him. And the final convulsions of Tony, coming at longer and longer intervals, more and more feebly, gave him a deep, almost erotic joy. He lay with all his inert weight on the now motionless body, on the fate that he had at last overcome. He could not loosen the vicelike grip of his hands. He breathed deeply, his mouth on Tony's hair. He was no longer conscious of time. Time had ceased. He could have remained there, in the dark, forever. Something awakened him: it was trickling down his wrist, it was warm. He bent his head a little, so that his mouth brushed over the dead boy's face. His mouth strayed over the burning face. Blood was flowing from one nostril.

Slowly, with a great effort, he opened his fingers, one after the other. He raised himself to his elbows and knelt down, one knee on either side of Tony's body. He took the scarf, folded it and slipped it into the inner pocket of his jacket. He searched Tony's pockets. He took from them everything he could find: a wallet, papers, a newspaper, a handkerchief, a pencil, the almost full pack of Gauloises. He got up. Gropingly, he made his way toward the stairs. Outside, the night was cool. Philippe looked at the luminous dial of his watch: ten minutes to twelve. Too late for the subway. He would have to go home on foot. He put his clothes in order, smoothed his hair and arranged his tie. The cool night

air made him shiver. He walked away, through the rubble of the flats. He threw the revolver and the bullets into the bushes. He walked more and more rapidly, nearly breaking into a run. Then, when he arrived at the edge of the wastelands, he slowed down and crossed the boulevard sedately.

"Where have you been?" asked Marie.

He came to the middle of the room after he had carefully locked the door. He was pale and distraught. He stared at Marie with empty eyes, as though he had not understood what she was saying. She was lying in bed, her bare shoulders showing above the turned back sheets.

"Where have you been?" she said with a slight tremor in her voice. "I was worried. It's after midnight."

He went to the window, parted the curtains and glanced through the slats of the shutters. He turned round. His jaw was set.

"A little account to settle," he said. "Now it's done." His voice was hoarse. He took off his clothes, hung them over a chair, and lay down beside the woman.

"I'm cold. Pull up the blankets. Hold me tight." His teeth were chattering.

"But you've got fever, Marcel!" she cried in alarm. "*Nom de Dieu*, what have you done?"

"Be quiet," he whispered entreatingly. "Be quiet. The neighbors might hear. It's nothing. It'll pass. Don't be frightened."

She moved away from him, her eyes dilated.

"You killed him?" she breathed.

He took her in his arms and held her tight. Tears came to his eyes and seemed to hang there.

"It had to be. Don't push me away, Marie," he begged. "He had to disappear. It was him or me. One of us had to disappear. He would have got me, tomorrow, you understand? I had no choice. He was a filthy little pimp, you see. A pansy. The biggest rat you've ever seen. He deserved to be hanged ten times over. I settled his account. It had to be. Don't push me away, Marie. Hold me tight, hold me close. . . ."

She began to caress him passionately, calling him tender little names. He let himself be petted. She murmured, "I don't care, no matter what you've done. I don't care, my little Marcel. I'm not scared for myself. But you, are you sure that—"

He shook his head. He spoke very softly, so as not to be heard by the people in the next room, "I left no traces. Not even footprints. I

took everything he had in his pockets. I've got it here. We've got to burn everything. Even the dough. Twelve grand, I looked. But we won't keep it, will we, Marie? We'll burn everything."

She rocked him gently in her arms. He was still trembling. She got up.

"I'll warm up some coffee for you. I've got a little rum left. That'll do you good."

She lit an alcohol lamp, got a saucepan and a cup. Philippe, buried under the blankets, watched her movements out of the corners of his eyes. The woman's glance fell on the trousers hung up over the chair. They were soiled with loam at the knees. She raised her head and met Philippe's eyes.

"I'm not asking you anything," she said curtly. "Tomorrow, I'll wash that out."

"Marie," he said, "we've got to burn those things right now. Now."

She nodded her head, like an old circus horse. Following Philippe's whispered directions, she emptied the pockets of the jacket. She took each object, the wallet, the papers, the scarf—picking them up gingerly, with repugnance. She opened the wallet and took from it the bank notes and the snapshots. She avoided looking at the latter. She was pale and resolute. With tightly compressed lips and a line between her eyebrows, she counted the bank notes.

After pondering for a few seconds, she said, "Do you think we must burn them too, Marcel?"

"Yes," he said firmly. "I'm not a thief."

She made a little heap of all the objects in the tiny fireplace. Then she poured methylated spirit on it and set a match to it. Kneeling there naked, with one hand on the chimney piece, she watched the flame.

"The scarf," murmured Philippe. "Be very careful about the scarf."

When the heap had been consumed, she collected the ashes in a newspaper, slipped in the wallet and the pack of Gauloises, folded it and tied it up with a piece of string.

"Tomorrow I'll throw it in the canal," she said. She made Philippe drink coffee with rum. She herself emptied a large glass of rum. The young man's cheeks were now red and shining. When he had finished his coffee, she put out the lamp and opened the window to let the night air flow in. But the blinds remained down. The shadow of their slats made bars on the bed. Marie lay down beside Philippe. Her hand brushed lightly over his body, which was burning and slightly moist. Then she stretched herself out on top of him, covering him almost com-

pletely with her body, which was large and soft and tender and violently perfumed like a beautiful fruit that is beginning to wither.

"Marie," whispered Philippe, "I'm safe now. Nothing can happen to me any more. Eight months that I've been hiding here, like a rat, without ever moving except at night. Eight months! But now it's over. The Yanks will be in Paris in a few days. I'm safe!"

She was lying on top of him. She held Philippe's head between her hands and kissed his mouth. In an almost inaudible voice, she asked, "Say, Marcel; one question, only one question, that's all, then I won't ever talk about it again. The little pimp, how did you—?"

"With my hands," murmured Philippe, "my hands—" Her heart had stopped, and then it began to beat again with mad violence. She clasped Philippe in her arms. She felt a wave of blood go to her head. Suddenly, the young man threw her on her back with a supple movement of his chest and shoulders. His hands were kneading her soft flesh. She moaned softly. Blankets and sheets slipped from the disordered bed. Philippe fell back on his side. Sweat was trickling down his chest and from under his armpits. The woman took his two hands, kissed first one and then the other, and laid them on the warm, soft spot between her breasts. She stammered incomprehensible words. Then there was a long silence. The warm humidity of the air was almost tropical. The hammering of boots sounded outside, on the pavement. Straining their ears, they listened as the steps passed below the window, passed on, grew fainter and fainter until they faded away in the distance. Once again, there was silence. Philippe's chest, striped by the shadow of the blinds, rose and fell in an uneven rhythm.

"What's the time?" he asked in a weary, singsong voice.

"Nearly one o'clock."

"Nearly one o'clock," he sighed. "Four hours more, then it'll be light."

"You must go to sleep, Marcel," said the woman. "You must sleep now, Marcel, my darling boy."

"Yes, sleep. . . . The night will pass quicker."

He pushed his head against the hollow under the woman's shoulder, snuggling up to her with the brutal and tender movement of a little child. A tremor went through her, and she hugged him close.

"Darling Marcel. My baby."

"Don't say Marcel," he murmured in a small, sleepy voice. "There isn't a Marcel Lefèvre any more. My name is Philippe Arréguy. Philippe."

A Day in the Middle of August, 1944

And now the day had come—It had burst on Paris, this day with gun shots, lightning, thunder, the throbbing and murderous flight of the German convoys toward the north. The last German defenders came out of the government buildings, raising their arms, and blinking their eyes like nocturnal birds. The day gleamed in the blood of the F.F.I., flowing on the pavements; it sparkled on the steel of the first American tanks entering the city; it flashed on the laughing teeth of thousands of men and women who acclaimed the soldiers of the Leclerc division. It burst on the mirrorlike surface of the river and in the sky, it poured down on the streets bristling with barricades, it spread like a trail of crackling gunpowder. And all over France, in every section, south, west, and east, the trail of gunpowder flared up and crackled, spread and consumed the rear guard of the last German convoys and saluted the irruption of the young *maquisards* in their shirt sleeves. The whole of France awoke and exulted in its radiance. Everywhere the shadows were dispersing, the forests of the night dissolving like the phantasmagoria of a terrifying dream, light poured down, day burst among cries and shouts and a delirium of joy; and the fighters who fell on the barricades of Paris caught, in their dying eyes, one last glimpse of the bright sun of liberty and went with the certainty that their sacrifice had not been in vain.

The day had come. The men who had been in hiding ventured out into the daylight, and no one asked them whether they were pure or impure. It was a day of universal bonds, of joy, and of embraces; every faith and every creed, every class and every face merged into one behind the barricades, and all eyes shone with the same joy of deliverance. No one thought of asking those who emerged into the daylight, like scared nocturnal beasts, whether their hearts were pure. Everything had become so involved during the long night, the confusion had been so profound and so horrible that it seemed better to postpone all too precise questions and to give the possibly impure a chance to redeem themselves by their blood.

That young man prowling around the barricades of the Place Clichy with a stony face and a strange mop of flaming golden hair black at the roots—who was he? Nobody knew him. He didn't speak to anyone. He belonged to no group. He was alone. He prowled around, ob-

serving, watching. When a German mobile machine gun dashed across the square and swept it with a burst of firing, he threw himself flat on his face like the others, and got up slowly, his eyes gleaming like a wolf's in his otherwise impassive face. But soon afterward, he was talking to the men beside him, F.F.I.s wearing armbands, armed with rifles, revolvers and Tommy guns; one of the young men clapped him on the shoulder—and later on that same day, Philippe Arréguy was also wearing an armband and holding in his fist a little revolver that sparkled in the sunshine.

In the afternoon, with a platoon of young combatants, he penetrated into the courtyard of a building that the Germans were attacking. The sun flamed in his hair and threw highlights on his smooth cheeks. All around him, bullets were whistling and burying themselves in the pavements and the walls. He advanced impassively and silently, clutching the little revolver from which a wisp of smoke rose up. What did it matter, to Philippe Arréguy? This day only meant to him the recovery of his security, the affirmation of his existence, the triumph over his dark demon. He would have fought against any one—Frenchmen, Turks, or Martians—with the same indifference to the higher motives, the same imperviousness to the meaning of the struggle. It so happened that the men you had to fight were Germans. So let's go for the Germans. What this day meant to him was his freedom, his right to go out and walk in the streets without fear of the police. This day meant that he would be able to eat and drink and make love, that tomorrow he might have a uniform and pay. But did he look that far ahead? Was he figuring it out in advance? No, behind that obstinate brow and that impassive face there was nothing but the excitement of the moment, the dark joy of battle. He advanced in the courtyard of the building still occupied by the enemy, where death was crackling from the windows and the roofs. He advanced, living, invulnerable, like a god. Hadn't he overcome his destiny? Hadn't he destroyed the curse inscribed in that so short line in the hollow of his left hand? He no longer feared anything. No power on earth or in heaven could prevail against Philippe Arréguy. Death was whistling around him, miaowing like a diabolical cat, splinters of rubble flew up round his feet. He advanced, sometimes ducking his head between his shoulders, automatically careful, but most of the time, heedless of the bullets, he was watching the roofs and windows where the last defenders of the building were concealing themselves. From time to time, he raised his arm without haste; the little revolver sparkled in the sunlight and spat out its dry answer. Thus

Philippe advanced, emerging from the depths of night, safe from now on, invulnerable, in his fist a small steel weapon from which smoke escaped, impassive and splendid as a young Jupiter wielding the thunderbolt.

In another part of Paris, Gérard and Pierre, who had decided to join the regular army, were waiting in front of one of the many recruiting centers, standing in line with other young men. Gérard was happy. Actually he had been happy since the beginning of that year, since he started working with Pierre, under Pierre's orders. He had given up his job and lived from hand to mouth, without a permanent address, never knowing what the morrow would bring, on the fringes of the law and of society. It was exciting. He had taken part in several dangerous enterprises with Pierre, and had realized that the simple fact of being alive, the joy of being and breathing, could never be grasped and savored in its entirety unless it was threatened at every moment. All his anxieties had vanished, all his problems had resolved themselves and there remained only the satisfaction of serving, the solidarity, the comradeship of Pierre and the others, and the conviction that what he was doing was right, clean, and honorable, that he was justified. Gérard never thought of Hélène now, the wound had healed. The last ten years no longer weighed on his shoulders, today less than ever. He had been under fire on the barricades with Pierre. He was happy. Not that this day was entirely cloudless. Gérard could not feel, with regard to the crowd, the same warm sense of fellowship that linked him to his daily comrades. He found too many unpleasing faces in the crowd, too many dubious ones.

Foolishness and stupidity were prevalent and accepted complacently. For instance, that fat tradesman who was so talkative and so obviously patriotic, who sported his cockades on a paunch he owed to four years of occupation . . . or the blustering abbé raising his cassock up to his knees, who bustled around on a barricade, surrounded by a swarm of young boys of the guild. He was cordial, too cordial, straightforward and jovial, too jovial, the "*curé combattant*," type for which Gérard had a peculiar aversion. The role of a priest under these circumstances, so Gérard thought, was to aid the wounded and to bury the dead. But this twentieth-century abbé, this heir of the Curé Pellegrin in the *maquisard* style, this ecclesiastic à la Clément Vautrel, blustered in military terms, encouraged the adolescents of the Guild with shouts of "*mon p'tit garel*!" and "*On aura les Chleuhs!*" He wanted to be popular, to show that the Church was fighting the good fight. . . . Bad taste, rotten

taste, Gérard said to himself. Well, let it pass. The Abbé Pellegrin was at least inoffensive. But the bestial onslaught of the crowd on a German who had fallen from the first floor of a house, the furious trampling, the lynching of a dead body, and the fat tradesman spitting at the bullet-riddled corpse—it is written that in no victory the ass's kick shall be missing!—these things were not inoffensive. It filled him with profound sadness and discouragement, it was a black and nauseous cloud on the clear sky of the day; this saraband of ignominy, cowardice, and stupidity around a fallen enemy. The forests of the night were still too near, their tenacious shadow still spread under the sun of liberty.

Gérard did not want anything to dim his joyful certainty. As he waited at Pierre's side among dozens of other young men to enlist at the recruiting center for the regular army—because all was not over yet, weeks and even months of fighting might still follow the liberation of Paris—he began to talk to the others, and offered them cigarettes. They were young, most of them poor, simple, and overflowing with obvious good will. They joked, bantering and without rancor, of having to stand in line to "get in the mess." Gérard laughed with them; it was really funny, here they were standing in line for the right of letting themselves be killed, just as you wait in line at a cafeteria. Suddenly, a strange sight rooted him to the spot. A magnificent car, painted in the French colors, flaunting the Croix de Lorraine, obviously the car of a millionaire patriot, stopped at the edge of the pavement. A military chauffeur got out of it. A few seconds later, a man emerged from the building next to the recruiting office; on the door of that building, a placard bearing the words "*Comité de Résistance*" was displayed. The aspect of the man who came out was so surprising, strange and unusual that the entire group of young volunteers fell silent and watched him spellbound. He was of gigantic stature, with a thick bullneck and a red, congested face. His flabby lips sucked at an expensive cigar. His fingers were covered with rings. The cloth of his suit was of a velvety soft, thick quality unknown in France since before the war. But what struck one first was the expression of his face: indifferent and disdainful, ruthless and satiated, satisfied and arrogant. It was self-assured, gratified, and pitiless. He was unspeakably revolting. He passed the young volunteers without a glance in their direction and made his way to the tri-color Cadillac; the chauffeur bowed and opened the door for him. The man let himself fall with all his weight onto the cushions. The car started.

Gérard swallowed. He turned to Pierre.

"I am wondering," he said, "whether I am right to enlist."

"What's come over you now?" asked Pierre.

"Didn't you see that—that monster? That shark? The man who came out of there?" (He jerked his chin toward the quarters of the Resistance Committee.) "I'm willing to be a soldier fighting for liberty, a patriot and all the rest of it. But I don't want to be an idiot. I don't want to risk my skin for that pile of fecal matter."

Pierre burst out laughing. His eyes twinkled with affectionate amusement.

"You're always so scared of being a sucker!" he said. "But haven't you understood yet that to serve necessarily implies being a sucker? Haven't you understood that, if you decide to serve with integrity, you will have to bear the contempt of the others, the fury of the others, and to be exploited by the others? Would you like to serve if you knew that they would rain honors on you, distinctions, and medals? You think you are being exploited and duped? All the better. What you are doing will have all the more value. Dear old Gérard, always harried by small things that disgust you and rouse your anger! I saw the shark, too; I saw his snout, his belly, his cigar, and his motor car. Incidentally there is no proof that he is a louse, a profiteer. He may be a great leader, the brains of some vast organization of the Resistance, how do we know? Some fellows are very well served by their unpleasing appearance. But if he is what you think, all the better. It would make me very happy. I like to think that I'm sacrificing myself for a world that is still so imperfect and for a cause that is slightly compromised by some of its supporters. I consider that that is as it should be and I am happy about it."

Gérard, however, wasn't capable of this aristocratic detachment; he couldn't accept the fact that his cause should be compromised by the impurity of some of its supporters. He thought of some of the men he had met in the course of the last few months, or who were known to him by reputation. Men of every condition, with every kind of background, who had been entrusted with various jobs—information, transmission, espionage, clandestine printing, sabotage, assassination. Two of them, whom he had known personally, were dead, shot by the enemy. Some had disappeared—arrested, deported to Germany. Others were still alive and carried on the struggle, openly now. These men were shining examples of uprightness and straightforwardness. Gérard would have liked the ranks of the Resistance to consist only of men like these, to be a phalanx of the just, an army of Parsifals. But it wasn't quite so simple. Many adventurers and opportunists had slipped in

among the just, men who would now exploit their quality as combatants for their own personal ends, or transform the mystic of the Resistance into party politics. For instance that Darricade who, as Gérard had recently learned from M. de Balansun, belonged to an underground organization. A second-rate individual of rather dubious reputation, who had been mixed up before the war in some ridiculous pro-Fascist movement. Undoubtedly he would now try, with his record as an active member of the Resistance, to win an electoral triumph for himself. Perhaps the participation of a small number of Darricades constituted the intimate tragedy of the Resistance and was the underlying reason for its destruction; it would not long survive the victory it had prepared.

At Saint-Clar, the day had also come, so suddenly and unexpectedly that no one could believe it. The day before, a small group of Germans had still guarded the bridge behind a machine gun. That night, there had still been the curfew and the patrol. And this morning, at dawn, the miracle had burst upon them; there was not one German left in Saint-Clar, they had departed during the night. The news spread rapidly. At eight o'clock, the square was black with people. The French flag floated over the town hall. The local Resistance Committee, headed by Darricade, appeared on the balcony, where a loud-speaker had been installed. The August sun beat down. Darricade addressed the people. The people intoned the strains of the "Marseillaise" passionately. M. de Balansun, in the first row of the crowd, quavered "*Aux armes, citoyens!*" in a strangled voice, while tears of emotion filled his eyes. Patriotic fervor overflowed his heart. At last, it was over! France was born again, free, strong, joyous. Day of triumph, day of glory! Soon, Francis would return from the Nazi jails, it could only be a question of two or three weeks now, thought M. de Balansun. Hope, joy, and emotion uplifted him and gave him wings. He ran to and fro, his hat broadside on, the tails of his cheviot coat floating in the breeze, hurrying with his short legs, his mottled face radiant: he shook hands right and left, and in his happy confusion distributed accolades all round—to his friends of the club, to M. le Doyen, to strangers; he even embraced Mme Coryse Salomé, who happened to be in his path. M. de Balansun was a Holy Alliance in himself.

Never had Saint-Clar known such an outbreak of enthusiasm, not even on the Sundays of the races in the Landes. Young girls went around selling cockades and Croix de Lorraine. Within twenty minutes, five thousand Clarois were be-ribboned; the town deserved a second

medal for civic merit, this time an honorable one. Young boys rushed through the streets and tore up the German signposts and the bars of German sentry posts; they lit a bonfire on the square, and danced an Indian war dance around it. As they were unable to affront the enemy in the flesh, these young citizens vented their patriotic fury on the dumb vestiges of German shame, on posts and placards. Shortly before noon, two trucks full of *maquisards* made their entry into the town. They were given a rousing welcome. Their leader, Captain Figeac, a professional soldier, went to the town hall and appeared on the balcony. And the Clarois could watch the symbolical gesture with which this hero of the open fight shook hands with Darricade, the pioneer of the secret struggle: the man of action and the intellectual of the party sealed their alliance. The *baiser de Lamourette*, historical symbol of a short-lived peace, had become almost obligatory on that day.

At noon, the Clarois went home for lunch. The square in front of the town hall was deserted. But an hour later, it was once again crowded with a compact mass of people. M. de Balansun, whose professional obligations, harassing as always, would have to be slightly neglected on this day, also made his way to the forum. He did not want to miss a moment of this great day. He wanted to submerge himself in the flood of collective rejoicing. An odd procession was wending its way along the street, amid derisive shouts, jeers, and applause.

"What is going on?" M. de Balansun asked of a man standing beside him.

"The whores," said the man. "They're going to shave their heads."

"Oh," said M. de Balansun. He repeated, "They're going to shave their heads," and applauded too, but not very hard.

Another procession arrived, an inspiring one this time: the procession of the young men of the town. They marched along singing, headed by the flag. When the flag passed him, the Count took off his hat and stood to attention. Then he recognized the bearer of the glorious standard: it was a twenty-year-old pimp, the worst scoundrel of the region who had been in prison for theft and was feared and respected by everybody: a kind of local "Jo-la-Terreur." The lad was very handsome in the bargain, with the insolent good looks of the hooligan. The Count put his hat back on his head and stood at ease.

The entire town was gay with flags and bunting. Women were busy making garlands and streamers. The rumor had spread that an American division was operating in the neighborhood, and everyone was convinced that the Yankees would arrive at any minute. (Saint-Clar was a

southern town, its inhabitants endowed with a lusty southern temperament. The teacher of English at the *école supérieure* was called upon: could he suggest a phrase of greeting? He proposed: "*Welcome to our American Saviors,*" but that would have been an insult to Captain Figeac and the *maquis*. So they decided to put "*Welcome to our American friends,*" which was more diplomatic. However, the Americans never came to Saint-Clar. Eisenhower neglected that town.

Certain disturbing symptoms were in the air. A small part (the wide-awake part) of the population became vaguely disturbed. Now that the blackout, spiritually as well as materially, was over, the spirit of criticism awoke. To begin with, people asked themselves by what right Darricade and his two colleagues had seized power. What qualifications had they? What right had they to occupy the town hall as though it were a conquered fortress? They declared that they were members of the Resistance. One was quite prepared to believe them, but, after all, what had they actually done? Not a bridge had been blown up in the countryside, not one tract had been distributed in the town, not one attempt had been perpetrated on the person of a single German N.C.O., not one train had been derailed. Who had resisted the Germans at Saint-Clar? Had Vichy not awarded a medal for civic merit to the town for its good behavior toward the troops of the Occupation? So why did Darricade and his colleagues talk of resistance? The triumvirate had seized the town hall, taking it by surprise. They claimed to manage everything, they behaved in a dictatorial manner. But it could be easily foreseen that they wouldn't be in agreement for long. After having fought the Occupation, they would fight each other until only one of them remained standing.

That is what a small number of Clarois were murmuring. But they murmured these things very softly, and only to their most trusted friends. A feeling of incipient terror permeated the town. People looked at each other furtively, distrustfully. The "proletarians" of the poor quarters laughed sneeringly when bourgeois or rich people passed them. The "*zazous*" went to earth, out of fear of the *maquisards*. There was a vague foreboding that, now the mailed fist of the Germans had loosed its grip, the local conflicting forces of which had been held down so long, might explode at any moment. The preliminary symptoms of a civil war were cropping up, here and there. Fundamentally, nobody felt safe. Possibly because nobody had a clear conscience. Yet at the same time, and that was the most mysterious paradox of that day, one could also sense a general impotence and foresee that all these vague

menaces would lead to no more than a mediocre farce—processions of shorn women or election campaigns. The joy of the morning had already been replaced, for some of the people, by a certain feeling of anxiety and disappointment, in some cases of disgust. Only the great mass continued to exult.

M. de Balansun called at the town hall. In consideration of his advanced age, his experience, his culture, his loyalty, the eminent part his son had played in the clandestine struggle, the Count believed that his place was at the town hall, next to the tribunes; he would be able to give them useful advice and lead them to a moderation that, according to certain symptoms, he considered necessary and beneficial. He was admitted without much difficulty into the hall of the municipal council. True, many people were circulating in the town hall who had even less claim to this privilege than the Count. M. de Balansun, enterprising as always, slipped to the back of the desk where Darricade and his colleagues were sitting—a Darricade with an even yellower and more bilious complexion than usual, looking worried and harassed. It was obvious that the new municipality was having the greatest difficulties in getting organized. For Darricade, the real struggle had begun at dawn. He saw himself forced to surround himself with the moderate and conservative elements, to discredit the Communists, and to stifle in the bud any revolutionary impulse that might take advantage of the situation to establish a dictatorship of the Left, or even the extreme Left. He had to assert himself, to find a firm footing, and to play the leading role. All this was a question of speed, decision, and audacity; this August day must be, for Saint-Clar, an 18 Brumaire. Unfortunately, his colleagues (Socialist and Communist) did not seem disposed to allow themselves to be eliminated. The result of all this, for Darricade, was nervous irritation, anxiety, and biliousness. One can understand his rage when he saw M. de Balansun entering the hall with the step of a conqueror. Fine, here was another who would do his best to spoil everything! It was almost certain that the Count's vanity would lead him to flaunt his former secret understanding with Darricade. Surely he would go around proclaiming to the whole of Saint-Clar that Darricade and Francis, that M. de Balansun, Darricade, and Francis had been valiantly united ever since 1942, in their resistance to the Occupation. He would refer to the brotherhood of the Resistance. Well? But surely one would have to be an idiot not to realize what prejudices, what irreparable harm this might do to Darricade's budding career. For the populace of Saint-Clar would read "union" as "collusion," "brotherhood" as

"conspiracy of the *cagouleurs*." The Balansun family was looked upon (quite unjustly) as "reactionary," and Darricade would immediately be classed in this disgraceful category, under this infamous label. People would say: "We understand! The *Cagoule* has joined the Resistance to save what can be saved, to discredit the progressive forces, and to prepare future plots against the Republic." On a day like this, when no one yet knew from which side the wind would blow, the alliance with the Balansuns and the adherence of the bourgeois classes were more than compromising. They might wreck everything. For that reason Darricade had decided not even to mention the name of Francis in the speeches he would make to the Clarois population. For that reason the very sight of M. de Balansun drove him to distraction. Great are the subtleties of French politics! The ways of the Lord are less mysterious.

Darricade was also vastly annoyed by the cumbersome person of Captain Figeac, whom he had pressed to his heart that very morning on the balcony of the town hall, in a symbolic and spectacular embrace. This dashing uniformed hero had elicited some admiration as he led his young *maquisards*. Saul did not look with a more jaundiced eye on the young glory of David, or Caesar on that of Antony, than Darricade on the swaggering graces of Captain Figeac. He was unaware that the wearer of the gold-braided uniform was himself gravely worried. Figeac, an officer on active service until the dissolution of the French Army, had led an unobtrusive and drab existence, far below his condition and his rank, after he had joined the *maquis*. He had even served under the orders of a lad of twenty, of mixed descent, one of those dagos (as Figeac called him behind his back) who had insinuated themselves, no one knew how, into the ranks of the Resistance and there assumed positions of unjustifiable authority. Certainly the lad was brave, he had courage and energy, he inspired his men. But after all, there are limits. A little Spaniard of twenty commanding a brigade of thirty to forty Frenchmen, among them an active captain, formerly of Saint-Maixent. The Resistance certainly had some surprises in store for you. The ways of the Lord were less mysterious. The lad got himself caught by the Boches, tortured and shot. From that day on, Figeac breathed more freely. Nevertheless, there were still many annoying little things, like that deplorable habit of calling each other "*tu*" that they had adopted in the *maquis*. Most embarrassing. Two days before the liberation, Figeac had gone home, to Pau, had pulled his uniform out of the wardrobe and aired it to dispel the smell of naphthalene, then he had put it on. His comrades of the *maquis* had greeted

him with sarcastic remarks and jeers. Most embarrassing. Figeac put up a good front. When a boy of his troop came up to him and tapped him on the stomach, crying: "Well, Pop, how's it going? O.K.?" Figeac replied in the same frank and jovial tone, very much the "partisan comrade." He would have liked to hit the boy and say, "Tell me, young man, since when does one address an officer in this manner?" Well, one must have patience, in time we'll get out of this mess. Now the regular army would be reorganized and Figeac would get back in his real place at last. Little by little, the disturbing elements would be eliminated, the anarchist elements of the *maquis*, the F.F.I. Unspoiled young citizens would be recruited. The old military hierarchy would again assume its rightful power. The recruits would be taught discipline, outward marks of respect, the salute at six paces. But in the meanwhile, you had to suffer the atrocious familiarity of those young lads of the *maquis*, and, what's more, pretend to like it, to save face, to prove that you had genuinely belonged to the Free Forces, that you had had, you know what I mean. "Well, Figeac, old man, how goes it! You look swell in your gold braid!"—"My dear Pierrot, we've earned today, haven't we? Do you remember the attack on the castle of—" Yes, Pierrot remembered. He remembered in particular how Figeac, who had been posted at five hundred meters from the castle, that is to say fairly far from the danger zone, had suffered from remarkably loose bowels, that he had been in a blue funk. Pierrot's eyes twinkled with indulgent malice. Most embarrassing.

But what was that? A woman was screaming in the corridor of the town hall. Darricade turned livid; he had recognized the furiously yelping voice of Fernande Arréguy. Indeed, it was she. She, Fernande, had been hauled away from her house by the F.F.I.s, led by Figeac, to be taken on to the square and shorn of her locks in public, with other depraved creatures. But she was struggling like a she-devil. She had called Figeac a "shit-bag," to the great delight of the F.F.I.s. She had demanded to see Darricade and to have it out with him. She was a hyena, a panther, a fury let loose. Her mane streaming in the wind, her eyes starting out of her head, she rushed through the corridor of the town hall, followed by Figeac. At the door of the committee hall, she was stopped by an orderly, a puny young man who had become a patriot that very morning and was standing on guard ferociously, his head crowned by a ridiculous infantry helmet that made him look like a candle under an extinguisher. Mme Arréguy brushed him aside with one push.

"Will you let me pass, invincible?" she growled, and she burst into the hall. Darricade rose to his feet with a drawn face. Here it was, the scandal. It had come. It was the ruin of his ambitions, his career was compromised. Mme Arréguy, hands on hips, planted herself in front of him.

"Well," she exclaimed, "is it you who gave the orders to get me?"

"Who has—who came to—?" stuttered Darricade.

"Who came to get me? The shit-bag," said Fernande, as though it was obvious, as though it was self-evident that among the thirty to forty people in the hall, the shit-bag could be none other than Captain Figeac. There were not forty, there was only one, the shit-bag *par excellence*, and everybody must recognize him at the first glance.

"It's the shit-bag," she repeated, pointing him out with a movement of her thumb over her shoulder.

Captain Figeac jumped.

"I forbid you to insult me!" he shouted.

"*Ta gueule, con,*" remarked Mme Arréguy with the utmost calm, not even troubling to look at him. She folded her arms over her chest and addressed herself to Darricade.

"Listen, little man, if you're the one who gave orders to have me brought here, you've got your nerve. I thought you were a dirty bastard, but not that big a one. Your head's the one they should shave." She turned to the spectators with the gesture of a Marie Antoinette appealing to the hearts of all mothers. "Messieurs, that son of a bitch has been my lover since '41. Yes, I've slept with that filth, and I will never cease to regret it. And as I'm being attacked, I'll defend myself. I am accused of having had a weakness for a Boche. Good. It's true. But would you like to know how that Darricade managed to gorge himself like a king, all through the war? I'll tell you: because he instructed me, Fernande, to do black market deals with my Boche. And d'you want to know more? Well, in '43, at Christmas, we got roaring drunk, my Boche, Darricade, and I, at Darricade's own place. So if they want to shave my head, let them get on with it, but bring him along too!"

There was a general uproar, shouts, and laughter. M. de Balansun was jubilant. This little scene diverted him enormously; it was picturesque, Gallic, a fine example of what he considered "*gaudriole française*." He also savored this little revenge on Darricade. The latter's Socialist and Communist colleagues comforted the prostrate man. One of them rose, demanded silence and said to Mme Arréguy, "You can return to your home. There has been a misunderstanding. You will not

be molested. It is known that you have not informed against anybody. You will be punished by your own shame."

Fernande was trembling with hatred and defiance. She was ready to defy the whole of Saint-Clar, the world, the universe. She was ready to proclaim at the stake, on the rack, her right to dispose of her person as she chose.

"To sleep with a German!" continued the colleague in a preaching tone. "You should have had more dignity, madame."

"My body is my own!" cried Fernande, who had been an assiduous reader of Mme Raymonde Machard in her youth.

Everybody laughed. M. de Balansun waved his hands above his head. "Proud Declaration of the Rights of Woman!" he cried merrily. Fernande threw him a withering look. A repartee was burning on her lips, "And your daughter, did she confess to you that she's been sleeping with my boy for the last year?" But she controlled herself. She remembered the old man's interview with Darricade, eight months ago. She took pity on him.

At that very minute, Berthe, wildly excited, transformed into a Passionaria, was leading a few members of the F.F.I. to the house of Mme Delahaye. A small crowd followed them.

"Here's where she lives," said Berthe.

The shutters were down. The crowd threw stones. Inside the house, Cécile was trembling like a leaf. What did they want? What was the meaning of this riot? The little maid, terrified, was sobbing in a corner the drawing room. Cécile turned to her, "I wonder, Louise," she said, "whether the sight of our national banner might not impose respect and silence on these fanatics?"

She went to a cupboard to find the flag. She opened the shutters and brandished the symbol of her loyalty, of her love of her country. A clamor arose, "Witch! Spy! . . . Fifth columnist!"

A stone struck Cécile on the forehead. She dropped the flag. Three young men came in.

"Follow us," said one of them.

She followed them; blood was trickling down her forehead. Outside, people lined the street to see her go by. Insults and laughter accompanied her progress. Berthe enjoyed the spectacle with greedy eyes. It gave her a pleasure even more intense than the visits of the "deuce." Cécile followed the three young men, her myopic eyes blinking in the sunlight. She did not know what was happening to her. She still believed that there had been some misunderstanding.

Darricade had retired to the mayor's private office. The Count, who opened every door without asking permission and walked through the building as though it were his own house, surprised him in this retreat. When he saw the old man, Darricade began to shake.

"What do you want with me?" he shouted. "You have no business here. Get out at once!"

"It seems to me," retorted the Count, "that I have as much right to be here as you. The activities of my son—"

This was too much.

"How much longer are you going to pester me with your son?" yelled Darricade. "Who do you think you are? The Number One Patriot of France? What your son did was exactly nothing. And if he let himself fall into the hands of a sadist in Bordeaux, you must admit that that has nothing to do with the Resistance."

The Count drew himself up to his full, though modest, height. Suddenly all the dignity, pride, and arrogance of the Balansuns flared up in him.

"You are a funny little man," he said in a tone of icy sarcasm. "But that is unimportant. My family has served our country for a very long time and we are quite accustomed to being exploited by the rabble. We are not looking for benefits even on a moral plane. That is what is called disinterestedness, a term you might look up in the dictionary, for it is sure not to be included in your vocabulary, which is fairly limited, I believe. In a word, neither Francis nor I have the slightest intention of eclipsing you, Darricade. We are not parvenus to heroism."

Having pronounced these words, he left the room. But he had hardly reached the corridor, when he suddenly felt faint. He leaned against the wall and pressed his hand to his heart. Darricade's remark had pierced it. It had reawakened all his anguish, his doubts: Francis might be dead. And as his chief had disowned him in this manner, there was every reason to fear that he was dead. None but the dead can be so thoroughly disowned. Suddenly, M. de Balansun experienced a pain that almost overstepped the limits of suffering. He was weighed down by the feeling of an immeasurable injustice and a shameful mockery. For a few seconds, he was absolutely convinced that Francis was dead, and that he had died in vain; that he had died to insure the glory of a Darricade and then to be disowned by this Darricade. M. de Balansun supported himself against the wall; he felt his knees give way under him and his hands tremble helplessly. He thought that he would fall. With an immense effort, he pulled himself together. He shook his head. No,

he must not give way to a moment of weakness. He must not give up hope, he must not lose faith in humanity. He must choose life, and at any price decide in favor of the light. M. de Balansun left the building. Outside, the same compact, surging, noisy crowd swarmed in the square. In front of the town hall, a kind of rough platform, like the stand of a vendor of patent medicines, had been erected. Something was going on on this stage, a game, a Punch and Judy show, a juggling act, something. There were two actors, one seated and motionless, the other standing, gesticulating. M. de Balansun went nearer to see what it was. He felt his blood running cold. The facetious, gesticulating actor was one of the barbers of the town. He was brandishing a pair of shears. The crowd laughed at his jests and at his pantomime. And beside this man, sitting on a stool, exposed to the eyes of three thousand Clarois, as the criminals and sorcerers of the Middle Ages were exposed in the pillory, he saw an old woman with white hair, half of her head shorn bare—Cécile.

M. de Balansun did not understand. He passed his hand over his eyes. The vision was still there: the pillory, the pillory facing three thousand howling spectators, and Cécile exposed on it, near the man who at this very minute, was seizing a wisp of her white hair and brandishing the shears. The Count quivered from head to foot. And then the Clarois witnessed an amazing sight: M. de Balansun, his cheeks on fire, rushed forward like Roger rescuing Angelica, or rather (to use a comparison more akin to the Balansun style) like Gaston le Roux leaping to the rescue of a fair lady assailed by a serf. M. de Balansun, as agile as he had been in his twenties, leaped onto the platform, seized the barber by the throat, floored him according to the most orthodox rules of all-in-wrestling, spun round and, taking Cécile by the hand, assisted her down from the platform. All this had happened in a flash. Now the Count had passed his arm under that of Cécile and was cleaving his way through the crowd with rapid steps, a tragic, distraught, and haughty expression on his face. Cécile trotted along as fast as she could trying to keep up with him, blinking her shortsighted eyes, becoming more and more bewildered; the cropped half of her head made her look pathetic, ludicrous, and sinister. The crowd parted before this strange couple, jeers and hoots of laughter followed them. Children ran after them, as they would have run after a circus. It was exactly like those haunting pictures of pogroms in Nazi Germany that the French papers had published from 1939 to 1940. M. de Balansun, trembling but resolute, continued to walk on, guiding Cécile and throwing menac-

ing glances right and left. The derision that enfolded them was tremendous, medieval, apocalyptic: stupidity and hatred spread in waves through the smug, well-fed, contented crowd, those people of Saint-Clar who had never suffered, for whom the war had been a gold mine and the Germans a blessing.

There they were, all of them, the small honest profiteers of the war, hilarious, bursting with fat and greed, the peasants of the neighborhood, those who had exploited the German gold mine scientifically and discerningly. And all the others as well, the thoughtless ones, the neutral ones, and those who had fluctuated from one side to the other, according to the news in the war communiqués; the tradesmen too, and the little maidservants who had been humming Franco-German romances the day before; Salaberry was there, the rich, devout innkeeper, flanked by his sons who wore scapularies. The women whom the Germans had despised were there too—they were exulting because they had been promised that a couple of half-starved whores, guilty of having slept with Russian prisoners, would be paraded through the streets. It was the day of vengeance, the day of holy wrath. Saint-Clar, brave as ever, had decided to make two prostitutes, devoured by tuberculosis and syphilis, walk naked through the town.

The rumor spread that Mme Coryse Salomé would be arrested too. But almost immediately there was a contradictory rumor: the perfumer had rendered important services to the *maquisards* and the F.F.I. A few skeptics expressed their astonishment. It was even whispered that the former mistress of the chief of the *Kommandatur* enjoyed powerful protection in the town. Pure slander no doubt. Why shouldn't Mme Coryse Salomé have played a double game? The ways of the Lord are mysterious. The heroine was applauded, wasn't she emulating Marthe Richard? The perfumer had sacrificed her virtue on the altar of patriotism. She had extorted military secrets from the chief of the *Kommandatur* by flattering him with deceitful lust. Unlike Mme Arréguy, Mme Coryse Salomé had used her body strictly in the national interest.

Jacques was there, on the edge of the pavement, watching the crowd. The disgust that overwhelmed him made him suffer as love would have done. His eyes flashed, he clenched his fists inside his coat pockets. "They" were loathsome, unspeakable. Their monstrous baseness, their cowardice, their ugliness. This day that could have been beautiful and noble had been disfigured and degraded by "them." To save these grubs of humanity thousands of men had died, millions of men, the finest youths of France had suffered torture, English parachutists had fallen

from the skies like liberating angels; to save these grubs, the Russian and American armies had performed miracles of energy and endurance. Jacques watched the crowd, and his loathing was as intense and unendurable as the extremes of physical ecstasy. Oh, to be no longer of the same blood as they, of the same breed, to break every human link that joined him to this sordid, sweating community, to become a plant or a mineral, to enter into the solitude of a stone. "I am ashamed. I am ashamed for the dead who have given their lives to save these grubs." He clenched his fists. He would have liked a German mobile gun to appear suddenly on the square and sweep the populace with a murderous volley. It would be fine to hear them howling with fear, to see them bolt, falling over each other, trampling on each other in a mad panic! Yes, even if he himself had to perish, he wished for a return offensive of the German rear guards, provided that he could see that vermin destroyed before he died.

His father-in-law was standing beside him. M. Lardenne had given in to the entreaties of his wife and daughter—"Better show yourself. Come on, it's wiser!"—and had left the house on this day, although an indescribable terror was twisting his bowels. The sweat trickled from his temples as he pinned an enormous Croix de Lorraine on his chest. He had clapped for the *maquisards*, and sung the Marseillaise. But weren't they going to hustle him off and deliver him up to the *maquisards* as a collaborator? Weren't they going to hang him on a butcher's hook? He had nearly fainted several times. "My heart will go phut, that's certain." As Salaberry and other people he knew happened to be near, M. Lardenne engaged them in a halting conversation. And Jacques heard the words: "My son-in-law . . . in the Landes . . . an English parachutist . . . we put him up a whole night, under the very nose of von Brackner . . ."

He turned round, livid. He clutched hold of M. Lardenne's sleeve and pulled him aside.

"What is it? What's the matter with you?" stammered M. Lardenne.

"I forbid you to tell that story," Jacques hissed. "I forbid it, do you hear?"

"But listen, Jacques," whinned the old man, "did we or did we not put up that parachutist? It must be made known, it's our only hope of . . ."

"You must not justify yourself to that scum," interrupted Jacques, jerking his chin toward the group including Salaberry, toward the crowd.

"But it is an action you can be proud of, Jacques. I cannot see why you refuse . . ."

"I can only be proud of that action if I keep silent about it. Don't you understand that they, too," (he jerked his chin toward the crowd once more) "that every one of them has his own little story to tell today, about his own little patriotic exploit? Don't you understand that, if you spread this story around, you are degrading yourself and degrading me?"

"But our safety—"

"They can kill me if they like, but I am not answerable to them for what I do. And I repeat: I do not ask you to understand me; I command you to keep silent. This is *my* story. Honorable or not, it is my secret. Respect it. I tell you again, neither you nor I have to justify ourselves to that scum," he concluded in a tone of furious contempt.

Pulling the old man along with him, he took the road that led to their house. The people they passed looked at them with anger. They would have liked to insult and attack them, believing them to be collaborators, but they did not dare, because they were rich and influential. It was much easier to shave the head of a tubercular prostitute than to insult M. Lardenne and his son-in-law. Nevertheless, a lad who was bolder than the others, shouted the word "Swine!" as they passed. Jacques stopped. "I'll murder him!" he said. But the lad had already disappeared. Jacques took M. Lardenne's arm again. Two minutes later, they were in the house. M. Lardenne fell into a chair. His face was purple.

"My heart," he gasped, "my heart—"

The doctor was called by telephone. While this was going on, Mme Costellot, who was in her room on the first floor and half believed (but only half) that the F.F.I. would come and drag her to be sheared, was gazing at herself in the mirror. She had once seen a film on the private life of Henry VIII, where Anne Boleyn, before being decapitated, stroked her neck and murmured "Such a lovely neck!" Mme Costellot stroked her luxuriant tresses; her eyes were wet as she repeated softly, "Such lovely hair!" She was still less convinced that her hair would be cropped because, foreseeing a catastrophe of this kind, the family had that very morning telephoned to an old friend living in the next town, M. Marcillac, "the well-known industrialist." He had promised to come and pick up Mme Costellot in his limousine and take her to Sault-en-Labourd, where she could stay until the excitement in Saint-Clar had calmed down. M. Marcillac and his limousine might arrive at any mo-

ment now. But even the near certainty of escaping the F.F.I. did not prevent Mme Costellot from indulging in a perfect orgy of self-pity. "Such lovely hair!" she sobbed, weeping bitterly as she gazed at her reflection in the mirror. An occasional bath of tears was necessary to maintain Mme Costellot's organic equilibrium. It relieved her from taking salts.

About five o'clock, the rumor had spread through the town that Mme Costellot had fled to Sault-en-Labourd, in M. Marcillac's limousine. A group of thirty people demonstrated in front of the Lardennes' house. Stones broke the windowpanes. The old banker, gripping the arms of his chair, looked at his wife and son-in-law with the terrified expression of a heretic who is being handed over to the Holy Inquisition. His eyes became bloodshot, his lips turned purple. The doctor had to be telephoned for again; a fatal crisis seemed imminent. Outside, insults and stones continued to hail. Jacques went out to the top of the steps. Silence fell. The sight of one man, pale with fury, had been enough to frighten off thirty inhabitants of Saint-Clar. They dispersed. Jacques came back into the drawing room and lit a cigarette. The doctor, Mme Lardenne, and Gisèle were bustling around the banker, who had been laid on a couch. Jacques looked with indifference at the old man in his death agony. He was seized by a sense of the supreme absurdity of it all, an absurdity too great to be expressed in words. This old man, whose whole life had been a failure, who had spent sixty years doing work he disliked—he who might have been an epicure, possibly an artist—who had clung to an orthodoxy, a social order, and a conservative philosophy that he secretly despised, this old man who had always lied to himself and to others, who had duped himself voluntarily out of weakness and inertia, was now dying of fright at the sound of the shouts of a brainless mob, dying in terror of a revolution. And it was evident at the end of this radiant day, that this revolution had been abortive. There would be no revolution. The rage of this impotent crowd had exhausted itself in useless bellowings against people who had been wrongly accused, against the scapegoats. A conflict on a world-wide scale had taken place; it should have swept across France like a purifying flame, but these people would learn nothing from it; they had closed their ears to its teaching, their hearts to its grace. Nothing would come of it but the return of the ancient municipal or electoral farces, the continuation of a *status quo* of injustice and mediocrity.

Admittedly, the jeers of the inhabitants of Saint-Clar, the ludicrous carnival of the penalized women, the trifling local hostilities, did not

weigh heavily in the balance compared to the vast mass of indignities and suffering implicit in a war. But by their very insignificance these feeble demonstrations were significant. The crux of the matter lay in the contradiction between what should have happened and what had actually taken place. After the terrible constraint of the years under the Occupation, after this interminable bath of blood, mud, and imbecility, it seemed only reasonable to expect a magnificent uprising, just punishments, the execution of the truly guilty, an outpouring of the shining waters of joy and hope. Instead there had been a speech in the good old election style, the Punch and Judy show of the shearing, a base jubilation mingled with ill will and anxiety. But perhaps Saint-Clar was an exception among the towns of France? Perhaps time would soon show that the greatness and the sacrifice of a handful of Frenchmen had redeemed the apathy of the great mass of the exhausted and weary French people? Perhaps it would be fairer to wait a few days, a few months even, before one could expect the country to collect itself and present its truly radiant face.

Yet fundamentally, Jacques was not interested, either in the resurrection or the agony of France. If the old ship, battered too long by a terrible storm, should prove to be no longer seaworthy, if its worm-eaten timbers, destroyed by rot from the inside, must rot away entirely, Jacques would resign himself to the inevitable. Europe itself was worm eaten. The very idea of nations was worm eaten—let it perish! Those men who heeded the support of a transcendental idea would soon evolve new transcendental ideas, vaster than those of *la Patrie* or the fatherland, and, who knows, ideas more concrete and more assured, more generous, and more efficient. As to the others, nothing would be changed for them. They would always make out.

M. de Balansun had accompanied Mme Delahaye to her house. He made her sit down, asked the little maid to make some tea, and sat down himself, not far from Cécile. They did not speak. Mme Delahaye did not seem to understand what had happened to her. The Count did not dare to look at his old friend's face and at her poor, half-cropped head, it hurt him too much. Never had M. de Balansun suffered so intensely. It was a bestial, hideous suffering, a shameful suffering. He felt ashamed for Cécile, for that grotesque head, one side of it shaved, the other covered with disheveled white hair; he felt ashamed for himself, for Darricade, for the crowd of Saint-Clar, for the whole world. The pure radiance of this day had been soiled by the spittle of hatred, deri-

sion and imbecility. The world had suddenly regressed by several hundred years, the dawn of the new era had very soon come to resemble a medieval twilight. M. de Balansun was not very good at analyzing so devastating an emotion; the dislocated marionette did not know how to be a human being. He was conscious of being unhappy, that was all; and this was a great deal, up to now, M. de Balansun had never been unhappy.

The little maid brought in the tea. The Count poured out a cup for Cécile and drank one himself. They still did not speak. When they had finished their tea, M. de Balansun bent over Cécile, gently lifted the old lady's hands and pressed them to his lips. Outside, the light was failing. The shadows of twilight invaded the room. They could hear songs, the joyous voices of boys and girls. M. de Balansun shivered suddenly. He remembered that, when he was bringing Cécile home, he had caught sight, in the town, of little Marie-Anne; she was laughing excitedly, and a young man had his arm round her waist, while she laid her pretty little head affectionately on his shoulder. They were standing on the pavement, waiting for the parade of the cropped women. M. de Balansun felt his heart beating hard. Marie-Anne—Francis— So she had already forgotten Francis. Already she disowned him, she too betrayed him. There could no longer be any hope. Francis was truly dead. M. de Balansun began to tremble.

"My friend," sighed Mme Delahaye, "it is growing late. You ought to go home. Thank you for your help, for your kindness."

Without looking at her, the Count squeezed the old lady's hand.

"Are you sure that you need me no longer?" he asked. "Wouldn't you like to spend the night at our house? My wife and Hélène would be happy if you came, I know. Or if you would rather, Hélène could come and sleep here."

But she shook her head.

"No, Léon, I will be all right, I promise you. I don't think they will come to torment me any more tonight. They must be satisfied."

She had said these words without a trace of rancor, as simply as though she were stating a harmless fact. M. de Balansun squeezed a little harder the frail hand he was still holding between his own.

"You are very brave, Cécile," he said.

"Oh, no," she replied.

M. de Balansun remained silent for several minutes. He seemed to be meditating, pondering, grappling with profound thoughts. It was difficult, for the man Mme Costellot had called "a solemn puppet." Until

then he had lived on a capital of ready-made sentiments and ready-made ideas, like a verbal automaton. The storm of suffering that was sweeping over him had suddenly smashed the automaton, leaving M. de Balansun denuded and trembling. At last he began to speak, with long hesitations. All his former boastfulness and blustering authority had vanished. His broken voice stumbled over the words and hesitated.

"Cécile," he said, "that incident was deplorable. But we mustn't lose sight of the beautiful reality of this day. France is free. She has recovered her freedom and her honor. Such an event cannot take place without a regrettable backwash. The people of France have suffered a great deal. They need token victims. And the people choose the first victims they can lay hands on, innocent or guilty. They are not very discerning. They are almost invariably blind and stupid. We must forgive them. We must find the strength to rejoice, because this day, in spite of everything, symbolizes our honor and our liberty. The most beautiful river leaves a trail of filthy scum and mire on its banks. But in spite of the scum, the river is still beautiful."

"I feel no resentment," said Mme Delahaye gently. "I believe the people made a mistake, that is all. Actually, I ought to feel sorry for them. But to tell the truth, I don't."

M. de Balansun got up and began to walk up and down slowly, with his hands behind his back. His hesitating voice rose again.

"It seems to me," he said, "that I am only now beginning to understand the world. We are old, Cécile, very old; we never understood our own era, we did not belong to it. Perhaps we were the ones who were blind. The magnitude of this war was beyond us. I am not quite sure whether I have quite understood it yet. But today it seems to me that only another divine Redemption could possibly save mankind."

He walked up and down, slowly, his head bowed, without looking at Mme Delahaye. Outside, the joyous songs soared up to the setting sun.

"This morning," said M. de Balansun with an effort, "this morning I was overjoyed. Not very long ago I was laughing and joking. Yes, in my sinister ignorance I laughed and joked. Now, I know that I will live in hell until the end of my days."

"My friend—" began the old lady.

"You cannot understand," continued M. de Balansun. His voice suddenly became animated, almost feverish. "I try to make myself believe in the causes for rejoicing and giving thanks to God. I speak of the liberty and honor of France, like the opinionated optimist, the old fool I

have always been. I have deceived myself with hope and optimism. But today suffering has unsealed my eyes. I see an unbearable reality, for which there can be no Redemption. I see that this world is a hell and that my son has died in vain."

Mme Delahaye hid her face in her hands.

"Oh, God!" she murmured.

"You cannot know," continued M. de Balansun with mounting exaltation, "I have kept this terrible thing to myself, because I still had hope. But today, I no longer hope. I know with absolute conviction that Francis is dead, and I believe he died in vain."

He stopped and leaned against the mantelpiece. Then, with faltering steps, he returned to sit down in the easy chair beside Cécile.

"It is not possible—" she sighed.

"I can no longer doubt," said M. de Balansun in a quavering voice. "Francis was . . . tortured. . . . Tortured for hours, perhaps. . . . Tortured. . . ."

He took his head between his hands. He breathed hard, as though a weight were oppressing his chest. His lips moved; then he added, in an almost inaudible voice, "I saw the photographs of the police. . . . Francis was horribly disfigured. . . . But I recognized him."

"It is not possible," repeated Mme Delahaye.

There was a very long silence. Neither of them moved. At last, M. de Balansun got up. He took the old lady's hand.

"Wouldn't you like me to send Hélène across this evening? . . . I must go now."

He paused, bowing his head. Then he continued,

"What I have told you now we must keep to ourselves Cécile. My wife and my daughter still have hopes . . . We must allow them to go on hoping, until it becomes impossible. . . . By then, they will have slowly grown accustomed to the inevitable."

He went out. The sunset was opulent and splendid, there were great rosy clouds in the sky and the swallows were twittering wildly. Happy groups of boys and girls went around singing. M. de Balansun walked along slowly, with difficulty. He felt oppressed, as though there were a great, painful lump in his throat. It seemed to him that his entire being was disintegrating. He passed a poor little church, stopped, went in and knelt down. The dark nave was cool and still; he shivered. He folded his hands and gazed at the little lamp burning before the altar at the far end of the church. He said, "My God," but he could not utter another word. His anguish and his suffering were beyond prayer.

He came out of the church. As he automatically put his hand into the pocket of his coat, his fingers came up against a pack of cigarettes. Suddenly, M. de Balansun saw Francis standing before him, on the station platform. He saw the fresh, smiling face, he heard the young voice: "Papa, couldn't you let me have some cigarettes for the journey?" M. de Balansun began to tremble again. He had forgotten this detail, forgotten the little request, the expression on Francis' face at that minute. It had remained buried inside him, since December. And now the memory rose up again suddenly, bare, precise, pitiless, arose with crushing force.

"I refused," said M. de Balansun to himself. "I refused when he asked me for cigarettes. That was the memory of me he carried away with him—" He walked faster, he almost ran. Young men turned round and looked in amusement at the little, white-haired old man trotting along like a madman. When he arrived at the bridge, M. de Balansun stopped and leaned against the parapet. The infinity of suffering. One can always suffer a little more; still a little, and always a little more. There are no limits.

He continued on his way. He was approaching the square. Chinese lanterns had been lit. The crowd was still milling around on the square. A harsh, pompous voice, amplified by a loud-speaker, echoed through the air. It was Darricade addressing the inhabitants of Saint-Clar in a speech suited to the occasion.

"No, Francis is not dead," M. de Balansun was saying to himself. "He is not dead—" Because of the little memory, because of the cigarettes he had refused, he felt that God could not permit Francis to be dead, it was unimaginable, unbearable. No, Francis would come back, and M. de Balansun would have the remainder of his life to cherish him, to spoil him, to make him forget that he had refused him those cigarettes. A few yards away, two young lads from the *maquis* were talking and laughing together. They had fair, sunburned faces. One of them vaguely resembled Francis. "Perhaps," the Count said to himself, "perhaps Francis joined a group of the *maquis* in Bordeaux." He had never yet considered this possibility. It suddenly gave him a little hope. "I'll ask them," he said to himself. "They belong to the *maquis* of the southwest. They may have known Francis. They may have seen him, one day. It's my only chance. If they have not known him, it is all over." It was absurd to play heads or tails whether Francis was alive or dead, absurd. But nevertheless M. de Balansun went up to the two young men.

From the square, the mechanical and pompous voice of Darricade could be heard saying:

"It was about that time that my Socialist and Communist comrades, that I myself began to organize the Resistance. . . ."

"My boy," said M. de Balansun, addressing himself to the young man who reminded him of Francis, "I would like to ask you something. You have been in the *maquis* for a long time, haven't you?"

"Two years," the young man said amiably.

"I suppose you have been all over the southwest? Pyrenees, Gironde, Landes."

"Yes, pretty much all over."

"Did you, by any chance, last January or later, come across a young man of your own age, who was called Balansun, Francis de Balansun?"

The young man thought it over. He turned to his comrade.

"Francis de Balansun," he repeated. "You heard of him?"

"No. Never heard that name."

The young man looked at M. de Balansun.

"I haven't either. Don't know him," he said.

The old man bowed his head. The infinity of suffering, forever. The black abyss, endless, limitless. Trembling, he raised his eyes to the sunburned face of the young *maquisard*. He smiled. He made a prodigious effort, a truly heroic effort, to smile.

"It doesn't matter," he murmured. "I thought that you might—it doesn't matter."

He laid his hands on the boy's shoulders. He was still smiling with his eyes full of tears.

"My boy," he said, "it is fine, what you've done, you and your comrades. It's very fine. It's thanks to you that our country . . . Allow me . . . allow me to embrace you."

He pressed the boy to his heart. The sob that he had been holding back for hours burst from his lips and made his old shoulders quiver. For the young body he was clasping, so young, so healthy, with its good fresh smell, was like the body of the living Francis.

On the opposite pavement, a little group of young soldiers had been watching the scene. One of them laughed, "Hey, get a load of that. There's an old guy kissing Robert!"

"Well," said the other, "he's a patriot, that's what he is. He's moved. The liberation and all that. It's the finest day of his life. He's moved. Look at him, poor old man: he's crying like a baby."

Epilogues

MARCH, 1945

"... MME ARRÉGUY and Philippe have both gone to their just reward. And good riddance for Saint-Clar. No one will miss them. They conked out within a few days of each other. That's just like them. Show-offs like them just have to be melodramatic.

"This is how it happened. In August, '44, Philippe enlisted in the regular army. A good way to square everything, he had said to himself, and he could eat all he wanted, he'd have his pay, cigarettes, and a swell uniform. So he enlisted. Philippe Arréguy was the bad boy, the terror of the sergeants, of all the brass. Not surprising: undisciplined and cranky as he was, he only did what he liked. Brave, true; ready for anything, foolhardy, afraid of nothing, as though a special god had been especially elected to look after him. When someone teased him about his luck, he'd show his left hand, grin, and say, 'My life line's short, which means I'll live to be a hundred. I've got a charmed life.' An all-right guy, that Philippe. But you couldn't trust him. He had the devil of a temper. He'd shove your face in as soon as not. A toughie. When we were resting in the Vosges, he had all the girls after him. Say what you like, you have to admit he was good looking. He had the kind of mug the women like. On the whole, his life as a soldier wasn't too tough, just a couple of bad times. For instance, when he had to spend ten days in the guard house, and that day when he pushed in the face of a cadet in a brawl, and he was nearly court-martialed, but they

hushed up the affair, because of his acts of bravery. He got low, sometimes. Then he'd get dead drunk. It was smarter not to pick on him when he got that way. But everybody liked him, anyway. With his kind of face, you're always liked. Then, one day, it was in the Vosges, while we were resting, though we weren't really resting, because we were in the front line, just behind a ridge, and it sloped down to a little valley and then it went up again on the other side, and there were the Chleuhs. For three weeks there hadn't been any fighting, because of the snow, ten feet of snow, and the cold on top of that. Well, it was rather a long wait, and there we stayed, looking at each other from ridge to ridge, the French and the Chleuhs, and nothing happened except sometimes a patrol at night. So then Philippe got an idea, one fine morning—I must tell you that we'd all managed to get skis, and we used to go on our skis to get some grub behind the lines—well, he got the idea he'd ski down the ridge facing the Chleuhs, because it was a grand slope, he said, and the sun was shining, a lovely sight. So Philippe made up his mind that nothing would stop him from skiing the other side. A crazy idea, you must admit, crazy as anything. We told him he was nuts, and then he looked as though he were going to eat us alive; he said nothing would happen, that he'd already gone along the ridge and he'd seen the Chleuhs doing the same thing in their sector; he said he had a charmed life and that it suited him that way, and that we'd better shut our traps. The sergeant yelled at him and told him not to move; and then you should have seen Philippe, white as a sheet, his lips tight, his eyes mad, putting on his skis without a word. And the more the sergeant yelled, the more pigheaded he got, and in the end off he went. We saw him standing up on the ridge, quite straight, in the sun, then he bent his knees and took off, and he was gone. We just looked at each other without a word. Less than a minute afterward, we heard a burst of machine-gun fire; it sent cold shivers down our spine, we could just imagine Philippe going up the slope again, with his skis sideways like a clumsy insect on the snow, a daddy longlegs tangled up by his legs, and the bullets throwing up the snow round him in the sunshine, little clouds of snow bursting all round him, like when a plane gets caught in the AA fire. We couldn't get him till nightfall. He was quite cold and stiff already, and his face all iced, and his lips screwed up as though he were mad with rage at having been caught, mad with rage forever and ever—

"Some character from the town hall came to tell Fernande about the

business, one evening, two weeks after the accident. That evening, Fernande was getting ready to go to town. She had slipped on her furs, and she'd put on red shoes with high heels. The soup was warming on the stove, for the old man. When the fellow told her what he had to say, Fernande didn't budge. You'd have thought she wasn't quite all there. She turned down the gas, so that the soup wouldn't burn—a good housewife, Fernande was, and she looked after the old jackass properly, say what you like—she turned down the gas and she said she had to go out to get something in town. The guy from the town hall was flabbergasted, he'd never seen anything like it and he thought Fernande was an unnatural mother. Then, when Fernande got outside, suddenly she didn't seem to know what she was doing there. She seemed to be thinking it over, as though she were saying now, let me see, why did I come out, what was I going to get. . . . Then she made a funny sort of grimace, very ugly she looked, her face all askew, and Fernande's not what you'd call a beauty. And then she said 'Philippe,' several times, louder and louder, until the word stuck in her throat. And she made off as fast as she could, not toward the town, no, toward the Gave, which isn't far. She went down the path by the earthworks, which goes straight to the Gave, at the village dump. The road's very muddy. Fernande slipped and fell down. She got up again, one of her red shoes remained sticking in the mud, and she ran faster still and then plop! a little splash and it was all over.

"There was great excitement in town, of course. The gendarmes went to look for the body in a barge, with hooks. The best swimmer of the town, young Baratchar, who's intercollegiate champion of the Academy at Bordeaux, even dived into the river. People said it was crazy, with the weather that cold, he might catch penumonia, and for someone like Fernande Arréguy, it wasn't worth it. At last, three days later, they did find her after all, stuck against the embankment. It was a nasty sight when they pulled her out, blown up like a bladder, her fur full of grass and muck, and the fish had already begun to nibble at her nose and her eyes. They gave her just a plain burial, no priest, of course. There was nobody at the funeral, nobody but the unloved husband and a neighbor. Aunt Eliane didn't come. But she sent a telegram. The telegram was long and awfully well worded. It's true that Aunt Eliane was killing two birds with one stone, if you can call it that, as the telegram spoke about both Fernande and her son in one message. Just the same, it was damned well written, almost no short cuts, and it was long. Aunt Eli-

ane isn't mean that way. There must have been at least three hundred francs' worth of touching condolences. You know, when you have to do things, might as well do them properly. . . ."

1946

1.

THE ELECTIONS have been held. They were fairly exciting, but not too much so. Perhaps people are tired. By and large, things are not going as well as might have been expected and hoped. Of course, everybody knows that you can't recover, just like that, in a few weeks, from the effects of a catastrophe that lasted five years. And it is not so much the shortages, the difficulties, or the worries of daily living that cause anxiety. Naturally, it is unpleasant to have to go on paying more and more for everything, to be hurtling toward bankruptcy with the speed of a rocket, to go on eating badly, to be short of coal, and all the rest of it. No, we're used to all that now and we know very well that these things cannot be changed from one day to the next. Besides, it is such a relief to have the Germans gone, to be free from that weight, that terror, that we would accept these purely material worries if not exactly with joy, at least with resignation and good humor. But there is something else. Something far more serious. How can it be put in words? There is a poison still around, floating in the air. The atmosphere is troubled and malignant. You can't breathe very well. All the squabbling, the hatred of those who a short while ago were united by a common belief; before the liberation, it seemed reasonable to expect that the French would achieve unity. But there has been no unity. There was the hope that the defeat of Germany would solve all problems. But now that the Germans have gone, other problems are cropping up, other threats. For instance, we are already faced with the possibility, even the probability, of yet another war. We read serious articles written in France and abroad, discuss calmly and coldly this possibility. Well, after hearing that kind of talk, there doesn't seem anything left to do but quietly slit your throat. It seems as though, once and for all time, this planet has entered into a zone of horror and death from which there is no escape. It seems as though the shadow of the long night, from which we have just emerged, were still sprawled across the earth; as though the old joys of

living, of mutual trust, of dignity, of freedom—and we're really not so demanding—of light, and of the happy things of life had come to an end forever. As though the night of the German war were still casting its shadow, pregnant with secret threats, with insensate pride, with blasphemous hate. But perhaps the shadow will be dispelled, a little at a time. There must still be men of good will left on earth. Perhaps if they stake their all on life and joy, horror and death will vanish.

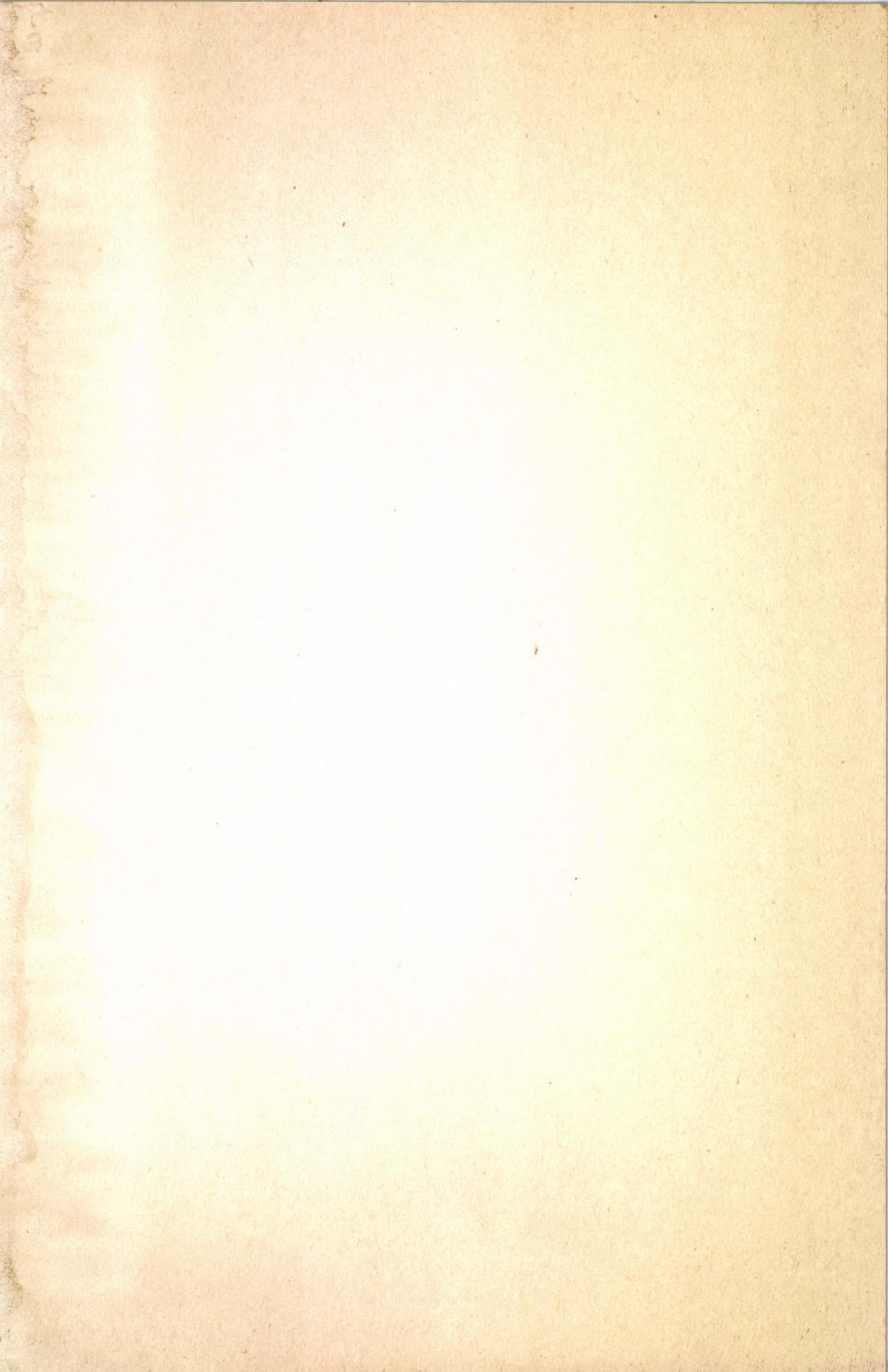
2.

"... BUT, after all, they harvest what they have sown, don't they? Damn it all, they wanted it, their blasted democracy! Well, now they've got it. Let's see what they can do with it. As poor Victor always used to say to me, 'My dear Marguerite, the spectacle of this world bent on its own destruction would be comic if it were not so distressing.' Did you read the papers this morning? The M.R.P. think they can throw out the Communists. No, seriously, that poor M. Gay who imagines his goatee is a magic wand. A bleating fool. The Communists will come out on top, you'll see. Who is there to oppose them? The Socialists? Don't make me laugh! Blum was never cut out to be a leader, never. My dear friends, we must resign ourselves to becoming sovietized. Or Americanized. Personally, it's all the same to me. What are you saying? De Gaulle? If he were more intelligent, more gifted, I wouldn't put it past him. In a pinch, he might appeal to the clear-thinking people still about. But he's a muddlehead, and not too, too able. It can't be helped. We'll be gobbled up: by whom, remains to be seen. With caviar or porridge. All the same in the end. One thing is certain, we don't count any more. Fight on at any cost? What for? Oh, I know. The union of all men of good will. Yes, just think, I have already heard about it. Darri-cade has been begging me for the last three months to run, as one of his candidates. He swears I will get in. Can you imagine little Mme Costellot of Saint-Clar in Parliament, making mincemeat of Daniel Mayer or Florimond Bonte? No, my dears, when it comes to playing a lead role— Later on, perhaps. Although I sometimes wonder whether I am not too old . . . It's sweet of you to protest, darlings, but I won't see fifty again, and— Oh, yes, my daughter-in-law keeps telling me that I get younger every day, that I am amazingly well preserved, that I have an extraordinary amount of vitality, and all the rest of it. Who, Gisèle? Poor little thing, she's exquisite! Ex-qui-site! No, no, you didn't

say anything you shouldn't, darling Lucienne. I know all about it. You can talk to me about it, you know. I'm not narrow minded and I'm quite up to date. Of course, I blame my son. Naturally I'm sorry for poor little Gisèle. But the person I despise with all my heart, the person to whom I should like to say a word or two one of these days, is that woman. Would you ever have believed it of her? She's the one who hooked Jacques, no doubt about it. And I always imagined Jacques had such good taste! Imagine falling for a girl like that, with her stringy hair and her Huguenot style! Yes, I know, they apparently met at the Pyla the other day. That beastly creature is quite unscrupulous. And entirely heartless as well. If she had any heart at all, she wouldn't leave her old father even for two days, in the state he's in. Oh, completely off the beam, my dear, but now his senility is inoffensive, while in the old days it used to be virulent. He never recovered after his son's death in Germany. Heaven knows all the trouble I went to, with von Brackner and the commandant of the sector at Biarritz! I was told there was hope. Poor little Francis. Although, between us—but strictly between us—maybe it is for the best that he died. It's awful to have to say it, but his instincts were not the best. Who knows, he might have brought disgrace on his family, one day. You know, all those lads who got mixed up with the *maquis* and all that, you mustn't fool yourself, were no better than they should be, what attracted them was . . . Oh, of course, there were some who were honest . . . Don't speak to me of Gérard Delahaye! Honest, if you like, but a fool, I'm convinced of that. After all, just imagine at his age, joining an outfit like that, surrounded by eighteen-year-olds. He wanted to be a hero, my dear. You can never tell what kind of people suddenly discover their thirst for heroism! All he got out of it was a bullet in his shoulder, which more or less cripples his arm for the rest of his life. You know his wife? A drab little creature. Yes, I believe she's a teacher somewhere in the suburbs of Paris. Oh, they are certainly a well-matched couple. Besides, Gérard couldn't hope for anything better. She's cross-eyed, I believe? No, you say? Funny, I had the impression that she squinted. But we chatter and chatter and I am forgetting the time. I have to be at the Fouquets at six o'clock. Their son-in-law will be there, the deputy for Charentes. A charming young man. He is related to the Wendels through his mother, yes, that's correct. What are you saying? He's an admirer of mine? How ridiculous, you're a naughty little gossip, Lucienne. A young man of thirty-five in love with an old woman like me. What's that you're saying? But certainly, I promise, I'll tell you everything, you inquisitive creature!"

3.

DARRICADE is in the process of making a successful political career. Everybody believes that he is eminently qualified to take a leading part. He has published a pamphlet, describing his memories of the clandestine struggle. It includes a fine tribute to Francis de Balansun. As the wind now blows from another quarter in Saint-Clar, Darricade is no longer afraid of compromising himself by associating his glory to that of young Balansun, the scion of a supposedly "reactionary" family. In the course of his election campaigns, he has often mentioned the young member of the Resistance who died abroad after being deported (in all probability). If a political enemy attacks him too bitterly and, for example, recalls the collusion of Darricade with the Croix de Feu before '39, Darricade throws Francis de Balansun in his teeth. When someone throws a martyr in your teeth, the only thing you can do is to hold your tongue, provided you have any decency left. That is what usually happens, and so Darricade always has the scoffers on his side . . . if one can call it that. Anyway, he won in the elections. On the whole, Francis' death is profitable.



THE FORESTS OF THE NIGHT

Tiger, tiger, burning bright
In the forests of the night. . . .

—WILLIAM BLAKE

